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# **Levinas, Messianism and Parody**

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**I CONFIRM THAT THIS IS ALL MY OWN WORK**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Levinas has come to be seen as one of the principle representatives in contemporary thought of a certain philosophically articulated concept of 'messianism'. On the one hand, the appeal by philosophy to messianism is conceived by many as a 'turn' within postmodern thought broadly conceived towards a theology and ethics. On the other hand, there is the closely related consensus that Levinas' messianism is an expression of a certain 'correlation' between 'philosophy' and 'Judaism', a correlation in which Judaism becomes the suppressed voice of conscience of the latter. We revisit some of the consensuses upon which these related understandings are based. Firstly, we consider whether the heterogeneity of Levinas' different articulations of the messianic dimension should be emphasized, a heterogeneity which defies simple classification. Secondly, we consider whether Levinas' thought can properly be called messianic as such: we emphasize the functional character of messianism in Levinas, and how messianism is structurally re-ordered according to the function it takes on. We explore namely the manner in which messianic discourse in Levinas is implicated in the construction of a certain humanism, and how it is called upon to negotiate the obstacles which such a construction faces. Re-ordered according to this regime, we consider whether what unites the various expressions of messianism in Levinas is not the articulation of a discourse which progressively realizes its non-eschatological status. We frame this thesis in terms of what we call the 'parody' of messianism, a notion we derive from Nietzsche. This complicates any notion of a 'turn' within postmodernism; and yet it can be shown to be an intensification of a certain tendency at work already within normative Judaism.

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### List of Abbreviations

#### **Levinas**

AE	<i>Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence</i>
AT	<i>Alterity and Transcendence</i>
AV	<i>L'au-delà du Verset: lectures et discours talmudiques</i>
CP	<i>Collected Philosophical Papers</i>
DMT	<i>Dieu, La Mort et Le Temps</i>
DF	<i>Difficult freedom: Essays on Judaism</i>
DQVI	<i>De Dieu qui vient à l'idée</i>
DL	<i>Difficile Liberté</i>
SS	<i>Du Sacré au Saint: Cinq Nouvelles Lectures Talmudique</i>
DE	<i>De l'Evasion</i>
DEHH	<i>En découvrant l'existence avec Husserl et Heidegger</i>
EN	<i>Entre-Nous: essais sur le penser-à-l'autre</i>
EI	<i>Ethics and Infinity</i>
EPP	<i>Ethique comme philosophie première</i>
EE	<i>Existence and Existents</i>
HS	<i>Hors Sujet</i>
HAH	<i>Humanisme de l'autre homme</i>
IH	<i>Les Imprévus de l'histoire</i>
LC	<i>Liberté et commandement</i>
NLT	<i>Nouvelles lectures talmudiques</i>

OBBE	<i>Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence</i>
PN	<i>Proper Names</i>
QLT	<i>Quatre Lectures Talmudiques</i>
SH	<i>Secularization and Hunger</i>
TO	<i>Time and the Other</i>
TI	<i>Totality and Infinity: an Essay on Exteriority</i>
Tel	<i>Totalité et Infini: Essai sur l'Extériorité</i>
TN	<i>In the Time of Nations</i>

### **Rosenzweig**

SE	<i>Der Stern der Erlösung</i>
SR	<i>The Star of Redemption</i>
GMW	<i>God, Man and the World</i>
PTW	<i>Philosophical and Theological Writings</i>



## INTRODUCTION

The word ‘messianism’ evidently does not exist in the English language. It is somewhat disconcerting to observe the key word of ones thesis subject to repeated automatic correction. ‘Messiah’ and ‘messianic’ are accepted without complaint. The latter most often qualifies the expectation of the former: it concerns the expectation of a figure whose roots can be traced to the appropriation of the near eastern theology of kingship made-to-measure for the particular Israelite situation. Hyperbolae applied figuratively within this appropriation became progressively, with the transition to the post-exilic situation and the destruction of the Davidic monarchy, literal attributes of a figure who in turn became the object of anticipation, an anticipation which progressively took on an eschatological character. This anticipation and its declared realisation take on a diversity of forms across the centuries, via its scriptural treatment in the likes of Daniel and Isaiah, its pseudoepigraphical treatment in II Baruch, I Enoch and IV Ezra, its splitting into two figures in the Qumran scrolls and early Rabbinic tradition, its integration among other motifs in the *sui generis* articulation of the Christ figure by the early Christian community, its pretenders such as Moses of Crete, its mystical turn with Luria and Vital, its scandalous turn with Sevi and Frank, its subsequent Hassidic ‘neutralisation’, its Zionist secularization and so on. In short we know where we are, given reasonable limits, with the word ‘messiah’ and its derivative ‘messianic’. This is not so with ‘messianism’. Perhaps it denotes certain morphological features shared amongst the diverse manifestations of messianic expectation, some examples of which we have just given? Once we start talking of ‘philosophical messianism’, however, an idealization whose intelligibility is to be detached from any determinate ‘messianic’ expectation of any specific ‘messianic’ figure, the consternation to which the electronic dictionary bears witness becomes understandable.

Required is a more precise understanding of this notion of philosophical ‘messianism’. The diversity to which its formulation is subject indicates to us the importance and yet also the enormity of such a task. Its origin could potentially be traced, as Fletcher and Bradley suggest, to the early Heidegger’s phenomenology of Paul’s Letters in *The Phenomenology of Religious Life*. Outlined here is something of an ‘ontological messianism’: eschatology as formalised structure of experience, the structural experience namely of time as ‘watchfulness’ stripped of the dogmatic content in view of which in Paul consciousness holds vigil, an analytic paving the way for *Being and Time*’s vision of the ecstatic participation of Dasein in

its own *end* via the existential of Being-towards-death.<sup>1</sup> Of more immediate influence, however, is the ‘messianic turn of deconstruction’ as Caputo frames it, along with the messianic ruminations of Benjamin in particular in his late essay ‘Theses on the Concept of History’.<sup>2</sup> Additional important strands are the Schelling-inspired vision of the ‘objective possibilities’ imbedded in reality furnished by Bloch, and the rendering of messianism as a critical-hermeneutical tool, as the ‘viewing of things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption’, at the hands of Adorno.<sup>3</sup> More recently we are faced with the parallel formulations of messianism from the likes of Agamben, Badiou and Žižek, all more or less taking their cue from Taube’s consideration of Saint Paul and the messianic suspension of the law or ‘state of exception’ observed at work in the latter.<sup>4</sup> It is here that a definitive cleavage in the contemporary formulation of the messianic dimension emerges. Both Badiou and Žižek attack the messianic posturing of the Derridean strand and in different ways undertake the subversion of some of its presuppositions. With Agamben we are faced with a somewhat inverted messianism of ‘impotency’, or of a state of suspended potency.<sup>5</sup> The rug is effectively pulled out from under our feet, moreover, if with Žižek we are not only to throw away the dogmatic content of messianism in view à la Heidegger or Derrida of its ‘pure form’, but we are also ‘to throw away this form itself’. In place of signifying as a formalised structural ‘ideal,’ promise’ or *Potenz*, messianism is reduced to the ‘gap’ which opens between the entity and itself in the re-iteration of its existence across symbolic castration and the production of the Lacanian Real.<sup>6</sup> Of interest finally is the recent work on eschatology within phenomenology, framed in terms of the problematic of Husserl’s relative neglect of the dimension of protention in favour of retention in his phenomenology of internal time consciousness. Articles on the eschatological dimension in the likes of Merleau-Ponty, Henry

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<sup>1</sup> Fletcher, P/ Bradley, A ‘Introduction: On a Newly Arisen Messianic Tone in Philosophy’ *Journal for Cultural Research* Vol13, No3/4 (2009) p183-189 and see also Tønning, J “‘Hineingehalten in die Nacht’’: Heidegger’s Early Appropriation of Christian Eschatology’ in *Phenomenology and Eschatology* ed. by de Roo, N and Manoussakis, P (Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, 2009) pp133-152

<sup>2</sup> Caputo, J *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York, Fordham University Press, 1997) p270, Benjamin, W ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’ in *Illuminations* (London, Fontana Press, 1992) pp251-263

<sup>3</sup> *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life* (London, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974) p273

<sup>4</sup> Taubes, J *The Political Theology of Paul* (Indiana, Stanford University Press, 2004), Agamben, G *Le Temps Qui Reste: Un Commentaire de l’Épître aux Romains* (Paris, Editions Payot et Rivages, 2004), Žižek S *The Puppet and the Dwarf: The Perverse Core of Christianity* (London, MIT Press, 2003) *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2003)

<sup>5</sup> See in particular Vloebergh, K ‘Babbling Redemption: Agamben’s Messianic Infancy’ in *On the Outlook: Figures of the Messianic* ed. by Crombez, T, Vloeberghs, K (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) pp115-120

<sup>6</sup> Žižek, *Puppet and Dwarf* pp140/1

and Marion further supplement the range of expression open to the philosophical consideration of messianism.<sup>7</sup>

Various interpretations of what this appeal to messianism is to represent at a general level have been proposed. In the first place, it is considered by some to represent part of the stock taking process of the discipline 'philosophy of religion'. Initiated by the Kantian gesture of articulating a concept of religion neutralised and domesticated for philosophical use, and the Hegelian gesture of 'getting behind' religion, articulating its essential intelligibility better than it is able to do for itself, the philosophy of religion must now contend with the 'open' and 'permeable' boundary between philosophy and religion: an 'inter-contamination' in which philosophy is never able to escape its own religious presuppositions.<sup>8</sup> In another sense, 'messianism' is called on to fill a void after philosophy's various well mourned bereavements. It is implicated, that is, in a certain turn within postmodern thought broadly conceived, or in various forms of return within the latter: a return of religion after the critique of onto-theology, a return of ethics after the Nietzschean suspicion towards mores and the return of a theory orientated by praxis after the deflation of Marxist hope. Significant also is its implication in a certain post-Hegelian philosophy of history. Replacing the worn out vision native to modernity of time as a continuous evolution, progressing inexorably towards a goal, is the orientation of messianism towards the apertures within historical time through which glimpses of another temporality are possible. In place of the telescopic glance into the future, there is the microscopic fixation with the present moment: the moment as 'charged' with messianic potential, as a 'springboard towards eternity'. In place of deferred teleological culmination, there is, for example, Benjamin's vision of time in which 'each second becomes the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter'.<sup>9</sup>

Most illuminating perhaps is the appraisal of Bourretz: messianism is to be considered as a response to the metaphysical implications of rationalisation. Weber's work is animated, Bourretz argues, by the recognition of the betrayal of the 'promises of the world' in the passage from the eighteenth to nineteenth century, by the recognition of how rationalisation is marked by a progressive disillusionment from the ideals which had originally animated it.<sup>10</sup> Bourretz keys into, that is, the Weberian problematic of the progressive cleaving of 'formal'

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<sup>7</sup> *Phenomenology and Eschatology* ed. by de Roo, N and Manoussakis, P (Surrey, Ashgate Publishing, 2009)

<sup>8</sup> Miller, E 'Derrida and the Problem of the Secularized Messianic' in *On the Outlook: Figures of the Messianic* ed. by Crombez, T, Vloeberghs, K (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) pp35-43

<sup>9</sup> See in particular Moses, S 'Messianisme du temps présent' *Lignes* 27 (2008) p31-39, Benjamin, op cit

<sup>10</sup> Bourretz, P *Les lumières du messianisme* (Paris, Hermann Editeurs, 2008) p6

rationality, or rationalisation, and ‘substantive’ rationality characteristic of modernity.<sup>11</sup> Rationalised power relations and administration in the form of bureaucratisation, economic calculation and projection, book-keeping, the separation of private from corporate wealth in the cyclical self-production of capital etc renders the former an end in itself whilst draining the public sphere of substantive rational or specific human or spiritual ends, those ‘venerable prejudices of the past’. Religion, the plenipotentary of these ends, becomes a ‘quotidian routine’: it becomes, that is, the *staging* of substantive rationality against the background of a sphere hollowed out by rationalisation. Initiated consequently is Weber’s ‘war of the gods’, or society cleaved by the strife between different religions: that is to say, between disparate loci of dislocated substantive rationality played out within an indifferent totality governed by formalized rationality – relativism or nihilism socially incarnate; a situation for which the analogy of the Olympian strife overlooked by the impersonal gaze of Fate would not be overly conceited. One aspect of this situation is the effective closing of the dimension of history. The principle of reciprocal negation implied in this ‘war of the gods’ sets up, Bourretz argues, something of a Hegelian dialectic, yet one which is going nowhere. The horizon of ‘Universal History’ culminates in that of the ‘Eternal Present’: the Rational locked into and imprisoned within a Real of its own creation. In what way, Bourretz asks, can a ‘horizon of hope’ be inscribed within this present? ‘How to preserve the horizon of an expectation proper to history’ or an opening in which history can show itself ‘not yet completed’?<sup>12</sup> How to propose a substantive rationality commensurate to the totality of its formalised counterpart? This is where for Bourretz messianism comes into play.

Against the background of the diversity of its manifestations, along with the weight of responsibility it is to carry, an analysis of messianism in the work specifically of Levinas represents, we believe, an exemplary means of gaining a more precise understanding of this philosophical messianism as well as its adequacy before the task set out for it. It is, we noted, in particular Derrida who sets the agenda for, and renders topical, considerations of eschatology with his appeal to a ‘structural messianism’: the ‘structural opening, the messianicity, without which messianism itself, in the strict or literal sense, would not be possible.’ We are presented with what is to be a messianism ‘without any content’, indeed ‘without religion’, a universal and formalistic structure of anticipation. This formalistic structure of experience is to become the condition of possibility, a messianic ‘a priori’, for any

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<sup>11</sup> See Weber, M *Theory of Social and Economic Organisation* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1947)

<sup>12</sup> Bourretz, *Lumières* p12

determinate form of messianic expectation.<sup>13</sup> Such an a priori or universal structure of experience Derrida connects in a late commentary on Levinas with a certain ethics derived from the latter: it is implicated namely in an ethics of ‘hospitality’ offered towards the other as stranger ‘which of itself already signifies a belonging to the messianic order’ and the structural condition for all messianic order.<sup>14</sup> Starting from Derrida’s ‘messianic turn’, a retrospective light can be cast backwards towards the lineage of Levinas, Rosenzweig and Cohen. Levinas’s work in particular can be seen as providing something of the ethical substance for this turn.<sup>15</sup> Levinas in general, whether intentionally or not, is one of the principal culprits in the rendering of the notion of messianism as acceptable philosophical currency. For Bourretz Levinas is featured alongside figures such as Benjamin and Bloch as one of the contemporary messianic ‘*temoins du futur*’, figures whose work serves as an ‘irrepressible reminder that human experience cannot free itself from the horizon of the promises embedded in it.’<sup>16</sup> Levinas presents us with a messianism articulated phenomenologically, one orientated towards ‘the obscure light filtering through the human face’, as Bourretz articulates it in rather Platonic terms, from which ‘emanates that which is not yet.’<sup>17</sup> Bourretz indeed gives Levinas an exemplary place within his pantheon. It is in Levinas he argues ‘that one meets the most decisive expression of the will towards the deformatisation of the system.’<sup>18</sup> ‘There are of course’, Bourretz continues, ‘other ways of mobilising the eschatology of messianic peace, but his (Levinas’) is exemplary in the extent to which it targets the very roots of contemporary nihilism.’<sup>19</sup>

Messianism has somewhat crept up on Levinas scholarship as a subject of topical interest. Bernasconi, in an article on messianism in Levinas published in 1998, notes that ‘eschatology, which perhaps by definition is always untimely, was particularly unsuited for the philosophical climate of the last forty years, which may also help to explain why it has been largely ignored in reconstructions of his thought.’ However ‘the philosophical climate has changed’ he adds, a state of affairs ‘nowhere more obvious’ than in Derrida’s consideration of

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<sup>13</sup> Derrida, J *Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of Origin* (California, Stanford University Press, 1998) p68

<sup>14</sup> Derrida, J *Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris, Galilée, 1997) p132

<sup>15</sup> Hägglund would disagree, arguing against the over-identification of Derrida with Levinas and indeed with any notion of a ‘turn’ in Derrida Hägglund, M ‘The Necessity of Discrimination: Disjoining Levinas and Derrida’ *Diacritics* Vol34, No1 (2004) pp40-71. This is countered, however, by Žižek, Puppet and Dwarf p141 who quite convincingly demonstrates the elements on which this ‘turn’ is based.

<sup>16</sup> Bourretz, P *Temoins du Futur* (Paris, Gallimard, 2003) p622

<sup>17</sup> Ibid p601

<sup>18</sup> Bourretz, *Lumières* p19 the contradiction between the deformatisation task ascribed to messianism and the formalism of its own structure has apparently gone unnoticed.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid p20

messianism.<sup>20</sup> It is in particular the last decade that has seen the waxing of interest in the eschatological dimension in Levinas' thought. In a large number of recent commentaries on Levinas, messianism appears as a topic worthy of discussion in a way that previously it had not.<sup>21</sup> Bernasconi is no doubt correct in assuming that this increased fame or notoriety is due to association with the controversy surrounding postmodernism and the messianic turn inscribed within it.<sup>22</sup> Žizek, whilst also himself presenting his own particular brand of 'messianism', pits himself against the 'present vague spiritualism' of which Levinas is the prime representative, or 'the focus on the openness to Otherness and its unconditional Call, this mode in which Judaism has become the almost hegemonic ethico-spiritual attitude of today's intellectuals'.<sup>23</sup> Messianism in Levinas is also implicated in Badiou's diatribe against the philosophers of the 'end of philosophy', or the strategy in which philosophy in the wake of its end 'transfigures its own impossibility into a prophetic posture.'<sup>24</sup> Rose locates the messianic turn in the likes of Derrida and Levinas with the gesture, entirely disingenuous for Rose, in which 'post-modern scepticism' is to be 'completed by a phantasiised Judaism'.<sup>25</sup> 'Suddenly, in the wake of the perceived demise of Marxism' Rose recounts 'Athens, for a long time already arid and crumbling, has become an uncannily deserted city, haunted by departed spirits. Her former inhabitants, abandoning her justice as well as her reason, have set off on a pilgrimage to an imaginary Jerusalem, in search of difference or otherness, love or community, and hoping to escape the *imperium* of truth or reason.' What is concealed behind this decamping from philosophy in favour of an ethics constructed from an idealized vision of Judaism is, argues Rose, an abdication. Its consequence is impotence in face of the real problems with which philosophy must engage, principally those associated with the mediation between freedom/subjectivity and substantive/objective law required for the realisation of justice within history, an impotence which the appeal to the messianic horizon is to cover over in an empty, speculative gesture of unification and in a 'a piety that separates itself from history'.<sup>26</sup> Such misgivings as to the messianic dimension in Levinas' work have been carried into the most recent wave of scholarship on Levinas. For Vanni, considering the value of

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<sup>20</sup> Bernasconi, R 'Different Styles of Eschatology: Derrida's Take on Levinas' Political Messianism' *Research in Phenomenology* 28 (1998) pp3-19 (p4)

<sup>21</sup> An exception to this would be the very early article de Boer, T 'Beyond Being, Ontology and Eschatology in the Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas' *Philosophia Reformata* 38 (1973) pp17-29

<sup>22</sup> Cited from Bewes, T *Reification or the Anxiety of Late Capitalism* (London, Verso, 2002) p59

<sup>23</sup> Žizek, Puppet and Dwarf p8

<sup>24</sup> Badiou, A *Manifesto for Philosophy* (New York, State University of New York Press 1999) p 32

<sup>25</sup> Rose, G *Judaism and modernity: philosophical essays* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1993) p23

<sup>26</sup> Rose, G *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1992) p256/7

Levinas' philosophy as a determinate model for social and political praxis, the eschatological dimension in his work is be put to one side as mere obfuscation.<sup>27</sup>

In engaging with these diverse appraisals and criticisms we shall take as our point of departure the observation that, despite the strong and growing interest in messianism in Levinas, this interest has largely been confined to a number of articles, summary considerations within monographs and comparative studies on messianism. The time is ripe, in other words, for a consideration of messianism in Levinas in its own right and on its own terms. This would be a consideration which does begin with any assumptions, in particular those engendered by association with Derrida's diffusion of his own particular understanding of messianism or with that of any other. Comparison has indeed been progressively deferred in this work to the extent that, in order to do full justice to messianism in Levinas, it occurs only on its very fringes. Before considering the relation of Levinas' conception of messianism to that of his contemporaries, other questions must be posed. First and foremost among these is to what extent or indeed whether at all Levinas' work is messianic. Perhaps due to Derrida's mediation, the answer to this question has for too long been taken for granted. In a late interview with Kearney, for example, Levinas shows a distinct suspicion towards any form of eschatology: 'Why eschatology?' he asks rhetorically, 'Why should we wish to reduce time to eternity? Time is the most profound relationship that man can have with God, precisely as a going towards God.'<sup>28</sup> Eschatology is here critiqued as the misplaced desire for metaphysical closure, a position reiterated in another late work of Levinas.<sup>29</sup> Yet in the preface to what is his principle work, *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas pins all hopes on the horizon of 'eschatological peace' which opens in the relation with the other. (TI22) Thus our question: when Levinas is critical of eschatology is he critiquing eschatology as such or merely a certain form of eschatology? Alternatively, when Levinas makes use of eschatological language elsewhere in his philosophical work is what we are dealing with here ultimately eschatology or another species of discourse which progressively reveals its non-eschatological character?

What is required, and what has not yet been attempted either in English or any other language, is a consideration of the particular circumstances under which the concept of

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<sup>27</sup> Vanni, M *L'impatience des réponses: L'éthique d'Emmanuel Levinas au risque de son inscription pratique* (Paris, CNRS Editions, 2004) p18

<sup>28</sup> 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas' in *Face to Face with Levinas* ed. by Cohen, R New York (State University of New York Press, 1986) pp13-34 (p23)

<sup>29</sup> 'Bad Conscience and the Inexorable' in *Face to Face with Levinas* ed. by Cohen, R New York (State University of New York Press, 1986) pp35-40 (p39) 'could not bear meaning for a thought that goes to a term, and the à-Dieu is not a finality. Perhaps beyond being, the word glory signifies this irreducibility of the "à-Dieu" or the fear of God to the eschatological . . . '

‘messianism’ enters Levinas’ philosophical writings. This requires above all an examination of the specific function which messianism serves in Levinas’ philosophy, and how messianic discourse is restructured and displaced according to this function. The title of Plüss work, *Das Messianische: Judentum und Philosophie im Werk Emmanuel Levinas*, indicates its purpose. He envisages messianism as a conduit between ‘philosophy’ and ‘Judaism’, and accordingly Plüss painstakingly searches out the traces of the messianism outlined by Levinas in his various Talmudic commentaries within his philosophical work. Plüss’ work remains as such the principal reference point for a global consideration of messianism in Levinas. Yet what is lost in such an encyclopaedic effort is the transformed sense which these traces take on within the philosophical domain. An appreciation of this transformation or displacement requires less a point by point comparison between ‘Jewish’ and ‘philosophical’ writings, than a locating of the relative significance of the messianic motifs within the latter *vis à vis* other elements across the junctures and disjuncture’s which constitute Levinas’ philosophical vision. It should be stated from the outset that, although we by no means ignore Levinas’ Talmudic commentaries, we are concerned with these only insofar as they impinge on and aid in understanding dynamics within Levinas’ philosophy. There are elements which will not therefore be considered. We shall engage selectively rather than exhaustively with the messianic tropes presented, for example, in *Difficult Freedom*.<sup>30</sup> Omitted, furthermore, is the question of messianism and Zionism in Levinas, or the concern with Israel’s ‘ethical destiny’ *vis à vis* other nations explored principally in *Beyond the Verse* and *In the Time of Nations*.<sup>31</sup> This has already received extensive treatment and is not of relevance to present concerns.<sup>32</sup>

In our consideration of Levinas we follow the three principle concerns determinative for the appraisals, both positive and negative, of his messianism thus far. Firstly, there is the question of messianism as an expression a certain turn within postmodernism broadly conceived. Secondly there is the question of messianism as the expression of a certain newly configured correlation between philosophy and religion or more specifically ‘Judaism’. Thirdly, there is the question of the viability of messianism as orientation for a renewed model of ethics or

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<sup>30</sup> These tropes have already received exhaustive treatment in other texts, such as Plüss, op cit, Ajzenstat, O *Driven Back to the Text: the Premodern Sources of Levinas’ Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh, Dunesque University Press, 2001) and Kavka, M *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

<sup>31</sup> Levinas in NLT63 also writes of a ‘messianic politics’, one based on the Torah, and characterised by a hatred of tyranny.

<sup>32</sup> We will not be engaging, that is, with Fletcher and Bradley’s contention that ‘Levinas’s phenomenology contains a barely hidden theologico-political agenda’, one implicated in a certain Zionist vision (Messianic Tone p184). Caygill, H *Levinas and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2002) among others, has done much to uncover this agenda.



praxis. We aim, however, to give quite decisively different responses to these questions. We frame our consideration of messianism in Levinas in terms of what we have called the ‘parody’ of messianism, a term we have appropriated from Nietzsche. With regards to our first question, the proposed messianic turn in postmodernism, Caputo writes ‘the news could not be worse for Derrida’s secularizing, Nietzscheanizing admirers.’<sup>33</sup> We think that, at least insofar as Levinas is concerned, things are not quite so simple. With regards to our second question, the notion of ‘parody’ serves to open our ears to the rumbling of tectonic displacements underlying an apparent extreme faithfulness to traditional sources. On the other hand, we see such a notion of a parody as not necessarily alien to the Jewish canon, as indeed something of an intensification of tendencies already well established within normative Judaism. As such ‘Judaism’ and ‘Philosophy’ find themselves in this ‘parody’ in a proximity which is entirely ambiguous. Ultimately, however, it serves to subordinate the question of the relation between Judaism and philosophy to what is the essential question in the consideration of messianism in Levinas. This question relates to that in view of which and the end for which this parody takes place. The principal question for us is not that of the relation between Judaism and philosophy across messianism, but the relation of messianism to that for which it serves as means of articulation, namely to humanism. The character of messianism in Levinas is pegged to the fate of humanism in his philosophy, and we make use of the notion of parody in order to articulate the fashion in which messianic discourse is called upon by Levinas to negotiate the problematic status of humanism. In the controversy, thirdly, over whether messianism is an expression of a re-orientated and renewed ethics and praxis or whether it is a last gasp speculative thrashing out we shall be fence sitters: Levinas does indeed provide us with a renewed concept of humanism, we will argue, yet only if we fully accept what humanism in Levinas, articulated through the parody of messianism, has become. We opt for an all or nothing attitude which distinguishes our approach from those of Vanni or Wolff, for example, who attempt to critically extract the potential of Levinas’ work from this work. We will commit ourselves on this score only insofar as we consider our appraisal as something of a riposte to that of Bourretz: rather than opening the horizon beyond the enclosure of rationalization, we alternatively interpret messianism in Levinas as inscribed within its *ritual life*.

We shall take as point of departure the question of messianism in Rosenzweig’s work, where the ground is already well prepared for a consideration of the notion of the parody of

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<sup>33</sup> Caputo, J. *Deconstruction in a Nutshell* (New York, Fordham University Press, 1997) p157

messianism. In the second chapter we shall outline the conditions under which this notion can be transferred to Levinas' philosophical writings. In the subsequent three chapters we will then trace the evolution of Levinas' concept of messianism, an evolution which can be divided into three distinct phases. The first of these is the messianism outlined principally in *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents*. The second phase corresponds to Levinas' early mature period, and concerns principally, *Ego and Totality*, *Totality and Infinity* and *Difficult Freedom*. The third period concerns *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence* and the cluster of works which surround the publication of the latter. We intend to engage along the way with diverse talking points on Levinas. Required of course a confrontation with what could be called the 'correlation' thesis concerning Levinas' and Rosenzweig's work alongside a consideration of the 'postmodern' status of Levinas. Equally important to us, however, is the question of the 'political' significance, broadly conceived, of Levinas work, a question which has occupied many thinkers and to which we consider the question of messianism essentially tied. We shall also identify certain consensuses which require revisiting: principle among these is the tendency towards harmonizing the various expressions of messianism in Levinas. It is our opinion that what is often overlooked in the consideration of Levinas' messianism is its dynamic character. As such, particular attention must be paid to the contradictions which emerge between the different stages of its articulation

## CHAPTER 1) LEVINAS AND ROSENZWEIG: MESSIANISM AND PARODY

### Introduction

In a consideration of messianism in Levinas, a comparison with Rosenzweig would be a natural point of departure. That Rosenzweig had a profound influence on Levinas is without doubt, and has been the subject of much scholarly attention.<sup>34</sup> From the outset, however, an important qualification to this should be made: there is a danger of over-reading Levinas into the text of Rosenzweig, a fault common in the secondary literature and which has been recognised by more than one scholar.<sup>35</sup> Whilst it is true here that we are returning to Rosenzweig principally in order to shed light on the eschatological element at work in Levinas, we wish to do so in light of the multifaceted character of Rosenzweig's work which Levinas-Rosenzweig scholarship sometimes neglects. Indeed, rather than looking back on Rosenzweig from the perspective of Levinas, the reverse in fact appears to us a more profitable exercise. There is a certain dynamic which has been observed at work in Rosenzweig's eschatological vision, which we believe can be profitably transferred to that of Levinas.

In much comparative literature on Rosenzweig and Levinas we are often confronted with what amounts to two allegorical constructions, 'Philosophy' and 'Judaism', the relation between which the messianic dimension in the work of both Levinas and Rosenzweig is to represent in parallel terms the embodiment. There is a tendency to envisage these in essentialist fashion as expressing something invariable and inalienable about philosophy and Judaism as such. This relation is interpreted variously as to details, yet as to its fundamentals there is a broad consensus. We wish to follow, however, and render in greater detail one

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<sup>34</sup> See for example Anckaert *A Critique of Infinity: Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Leuven, Peeters, 2006); Cohen, R.A. *Elevations: the Height of the Good in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1994) Moses, S. *Systeme et Revelation: la philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig* (Paris, 2003, Bayard); Schlegel J.L. 'Levinas et Rosenzweig' in *Les Cahiers de la Nuit Surveillée* ed. By Jacques Rolland (Paris, Verdier, 1984) pp54-78; Gibbs, *Correlations in Rosenzweig and Levinas* (Princeton NJ, Princeton University Press, 1992); R. Kavka *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

<sup>35</sup> Gordon, EL *Rosenzweig and Heidegger: Between German and Jewish Philosophy* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003) p xx, for example, pinpoints well the multivalence of Rosenzweig's work sometimes neglected in comparative work between the latter and Levinas. He writes the following: In the study of Rosenzweig's philosophy, the great variety of his philosophical interests – some might call it eclecticism – is often hidden from view. He considers the various narrow frames of reference in which Rosenzweig's work has often been reduced in being considered as an anticipation of the work of Levinas. Whilst there is much to recommend these perspectives', he continues 'they conceal about as much as they reveal about Rosenzweig as an independent thinker.'

See also Schlegel, Levinas et Rosenzweig p51: 'we have to ask ourselves if our reading [of Rosenzweig] is not from now on clouded, at least in part, by reminiscence of the work of Levinas.'

possible way which departs quite significantly from this consensus, although it does have as precedent some quite notable figures in the context of Rosenzweig scholarship. In so doing, we will give consideration to one aspect of Rosenzweig's theory perhaps until now not given sufficient prominence, namely the proximity of Rosenzweig's messianic discourse precisely to the discourse which would seem to be its most implacable rival, that of Nietzsche. We will in turn consider the possibility of transferring this dynamic between philosophy and Judaism from the context of Rosenzweig to Levinas scholarship. Our consideration of Rosenzweig's work will be limited for the most part to his chef d'oeuvre the *Star of Redemption*, although appeal will be made to other works wherever useful in explaining certain passages in the latter text.

### Messianism and Philosophy in Rosenzweig

An understanding of messianism in Rosenzweig requires an understanding of the specific role it plays within the wider problematic of the *Star*. Messianism in Rosenzweig is called on to fulfil a quite specific function within this problematic, as one of the nodes of what Rosenzweig frames in quite idiosyncratic fashion as 'theology'. The need for theology arises, according to Rosenzweig due to the predicament in which a certain branch of contemporary thought finds itself.

To be precise, Rosenzweig's vision of Redemption takes on significance in the context of his discussion of the relation between philosophy and theology, a discussion which takes as its point of departure the rejection of the Hegelian model for philosophy. This is the philosophy of the comprehensive and impersonal universal into which all individuality, including that of the philosopher himself, is lost. Rejecting this model, Rosenzweig instead allies himself with the model of the 'new philosopher' provided principally by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, for whom the philosopher himself, in the very irrationality of his individuality and mortality, becomes the irreducible point of departure from which all philosophical intelligibility is to be articulated. Rosenzweig summarises this transition: 'no longer is the objectively intelligible All its subject, or the intellection of this objectivity. Now it is the *Weltanschauung*, the idea with which an individual mind reacts to the impression which the world makes on him.' (SR105, SE134) This is the philosophy with which Rosenzweig engages and from within which he formulates his own vision. The possibility of a trans-personal universal is abandoned in the face of the perspectivism of a subject in immediate and vital

engagement with the world: 'its new point of departure is the subjective, the extremely personal self, more than that: the incomparable self, immersed in itself.' (SR106, SE135)

Rosenzweig outlines the problematic which arises given such a philosophy:

The old type of philosopher, impersonal by profession, a mere deputy of the naturally one-dimensional history of philosophy is replaced by a highly personal type, the philosopher of the *Weltanschauung*, the point of view. And here the questionable aspect of the new philosophy steps into plain view, and all serious philosophical efforts are bound to be accosted by the questions put to Nietzsche: Is this still science? (SR105, SE135)

The problematic for the *Weltanschauung* philosopher is namely is how to philosophise without any element of *objectivity*. Moses underlines the importance of Nietzsche in the formative period of the *Star of Redemption*. From biographical sources it is evident that Nietzsche provoked in Rosenzweig a fall into relativism and into scepticism. It was to counter this that Rosenzweig began to give more weighty consideration to religion as a possible solution.<sup>36</sup> The starting point and basis for the consideration of religion, Judaism and eschatology is a certain conception of philosophy, in particular that of Nietzsche. 'For the sake of its very status as science, philosophy today requires theologians to philosophize' writes Rosenzweig. Equally however: 'the theologian whom philosophy requires for the sake of its scientific status is himself a theologian who requires philosophy – for the sake of his integrity.' (SR106, SE136) Theology equally 'requires' philosophy for its 'integrity', the 'integrity' namely of subjective experience. Theology can import nothing of its narrative and articles of faith from outside that cannot be articulated in the terms of Nietzsche's *Weltanschauung* orientated philosophy. In other words, the *Weltanschauung* must be transcended from the inside. Theology, Judaism, Messianism are to be formulated from within the parameters provided and exigencies imposed by this philosophy.

Theology in the *Star of Redemption* is composed of a narrative involving a vision of cosmological time staggered across three great cosmological episodes: Creation, Revelation and Redemption. This narrative charts the movement whereby God, Man and World, initially utterly separate and self-enclosed, emerge from separation to reach out towards each other. They do this in such a fashion that they transform each other and themselves and by so doing create a configuration encompassing a set of interrelations. This configuration is to represent the ultimate fulfilment and indeed redemption of these three elements, including God who in

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<sup>36</sup> Moses, *Systeme et Revelation* pp28-32

the process of the narrative redeems himself of his own self-contradiction which the original separation of the elements which God should encompass represents. This narrative in fact has four stages. The first is that of the 'proto-cosmos', the state of fragmentation 'prior' to Creation in which all three elements exist in separation. Creation then appears principally as a relation between God and the World. Revelation is principally a relation between God and Man through the World. Redemption in turn is framed principally as a relation between Man and World which God oversees.

In this narrative special privilege is given to the perspective of Man, which results in turn in special privilege being granted to the cosmological event of Revelation: the cosmological *narrative* becomes, in other words, the basis of an existential *structure* which pivots on the axis of Revelation. Revelation is the first meeting point in Rosenzweig's text of all three elements together: God, Man and World. There has at this point already passed the cosmological episode of Creation, through which the cosmos has become poised for Revelation: God has left self-enclosure to create the world, whilst the world has left its self-enclosure by expressing its incompleteness, and thus dependency on a creator. The state in which Man exists before the episode of Revelation is described in terms of the self-enclosure and 'solitude' of the 'tragic' Man detached from the World, insofar as he pits his unique individuality against the impersonality of the World. The event of Revelation, however, is an interpolation of this ego by God across the World. A self is born in this call from God which exceeds the detached ego immured in itself. The purely Nietzschean subject, that is, immersed in his own *Weltanschauung*, his own engagement with the world, is called beyond itself and thus to objectivity.

Revelation is that which constitutes 'the bridge from maximum subjectivity to maximum objectivity', as Rosenzweig puts it. Revelation is here understood as the 'miracle of the personal experience of revelation'. (SR106, SE135) Revelation is not intended in the sense of a historical Revelation within a specific religion. Rosenzweig rejects the notion of 'religion', insofar as this implies a separation between 'religious' experience and mere 'life': 'Life' is already more than mere life, is already in a sense itself religious. The events, the '*Ereignisse*' of 'everyday life' which is always more than simple life are the foundation of Revelation. Rosenzweig offers a primordial form of revelation, in parallel to that offered by Otto for example, upon which the specifically or positively religious sense is subsequently based: 'everyone experiences it at some point, because it is given to everyone in some form'. (GMW114) This 'primal religion' for Rosenzweig is essentially the religion of the pure, structural experience of the world.

Revelation becomes the ‘miracle of the personal experience of revelation’, which can ultimately be abridged to the ‘miracle of personal experience.’ Personal experience constitutes a form of revelation insofar as it constitutes a form of ‘*miracle*’. Experience takes on this sense insofar as Rosenzweig interprets miracle according to what he frames as its original sense: miracle, Rosenzweig tells us, is not primordially an event which defies understanding or understood physical laws; it is rather an event which represents the *fulfilment* of a previous *prophecy*. To be precise, what is fulfilled in the miracle of personal experience is the ‘prophecy’ of Creation. Creation is here understood as the primordial ‘structure’ of the world as a dynamic between individual and species called alternatively the ‘world spirit’ or the ‘logos of the world’. The ‘world spirit’ is characterised by universal validity, insofar as being able to ensure that each particular which enters it can be allocated a place, without which the meaningful character of experience would not be possible. For each individual to be meaningful and comprehensible it must take a place in the whole. Without the global integrity of this ‘logos of the world’ at each moment, the meaningful character of each individual experience would not be possible. Yet the ‘logos’ for Rosenzweig is not to be a rigid formalistic structure. Firstly, it is not a ‘logic’ but what Rosenzweig calls a universal ‘grammar’ of creation, in which the world is ordered according to a set of general linguistic rather than logical categories: Creation is for Rosenzweig the ‘language’ of God which already in some sense calls to Man. Beyond this, the ‘logos’ is not an eternal and rigid system of discrete schemata but rather a multi-dimensional ‘configuration’: ‘threads and relationships run from every individual point to every other, and to the whole’ in which each particular finds its own unique way to the universal logos via its relation with other particulars. (SR52, SE68) As such, the world ‘logos’ or ‘spirit’ is not set in stone: it in fact requires constant renewal, given the constant flow of new life and new particularity that enters it.

This logos of the world is caught between prophecy and the miracle of its fulfilment, or between Creation and Revelation, by virtue of the very temporality of the world spirit already implied in Creation. The passage from Creation to Revelation signifies the manner in which the ‘logos of the world’ is put into action with each ‘lived’ moment. Creation for Rosenzweig does not signify a once and for all finished act in the beginning. Creation signifies the manner in which the world expresses its dependence on its Creator not once and for all in the past, but always throughout time by virtue of the fact that, with the constant birth of new particulars from all corners of Creation, the latter is in constant need of a renewal of its ability to render these particulars meaningful, to integrate them into its universal configuration. For this it requires the constant creative activity of God. Thus the world comes out of its apparent

separation and shows its dependence on God. God in effect, according to Rosenzweig, recreates universality for the world at each moment. At any given moment, an object can only be affirmed as meaningful, if it can be understood as ‘thus and not otherwise’ (SR27, SE37). Experience at any given moment must function, that is, according to universal categories. These categories however require renewal, indeed recreation, at each moment. The miracle of Creation, in which it reveals its dependence on a Creator, takes place at every moment and signifies the fashion in which essence can at once be universal and yet be in a process of constant alteration; Each eternity lasts for only a moment: ‘It is the moment which, within its own constricted space, harbours all the weight of destiny, a destiny not “destined” but suddenly there and yet as inescapable as though it were destined from yore.’ (nicht “verhängt” sondern plötzlich da und in seiner Plötzlichkeit doch unabwendbar, als wäre es verhängt von Uran.) (SR160, SE203)<sup>37</sup> God renews the world at each moment, creating an ever new momentary eternity without which neither language nor meaningful experience of the world could exist. The logos or *grammar* of creation is brought to life at each moment: it becomes *speech*. This logos or grammar could not in itself already forecast or comprehend this moment, because each moment is absolutely singular. It is as such prophecy as opposed to prediction. This prophecy is nonetheless always fulfilled with each moment with the ever successful recreation of the meaningful configuration of the world, since despite the absolute singularity of the moment the prophesied structured ‘logos’ or ‘spirit’ of the world is once more accomplished. Revelation represents the advent of objectivity as the ‘vitality’ of the absolute singular moment which fulfils the prophecy of the general logos of Creation in embodying it in ever unique ways.

It is as such that the experience of Revelation is the experience of ‘maximum objectivity’ beyond the *Weltanschauung* of the individual subject. Revelation signifies here the fashion in which the subject himself experiences the novelty of this renewal of the World across time as a relation between himself and the creator who has accomplished it. The world configuration was valid only for the previous moment: in the transitory present moment this configuration is in the process of being renewed. This present transition is the moment of the pure *receptivity* of the subject in which the subject is *open* to an objectivity beyond itself. The moment of Revelation is the moment of ‘maximum’ objectivity in the pure present in the *transition* in which the present world configuration or world spirit fructifies, crystallises. Rosenzweig

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<sup>37</sup> We cite here in German also since we believe the English translation catches the full sense of the *Plötzlichkeit*, ‘abruptness’: its suddenness is its very fateful character, not at odds with it as the English translation suggests. In its abruptness it imposes itself, in its inevitability, as fate.



writes of this transition in terms of the object of experience ‘irradiated by the effulgence (Aufleuchten) of a revelation taking place at that very moment’ in which it ‘emerges from its substantive past into its vital present.’ (SR161, SE206) As Rosenzweig relates in the *Urzelle*, the individual in his particular point in the world experiences an individual morsel of the world following one unique path in the multi-stranded course towards the world configuration. (PTW63)

This object as suddenly experienced, encountered in the present, represents God revealing himself through the object. Revelation signifies the momentary vivifying of the object of experience against the background of the renewal of the world configuration of which it is an exemplar. Revelation signifies the experience of the present as the layer of experience in which God, who created the World in the past, expresses himself as Creator. Alternatively, the object is *expressed* as the creation of the creator, is imbued with His ‘breath’. (SR161, SE205) In this vital moment in which God expresses himself through the renewal of creation, the full weight of the objectivity of God’s potency in creation is felt, alongside the exigency of this *call* coming in love precisely from *elsewhere* than the *Weltanschauung* of the subject. The grammar of Creation becomes *speech* as the speech of the Creator through His renewed Creation. Faith for Rosenzweig is not the subjective par excellence but, inspired by Schelling’s ‘positive philosophy’, rather the opposite: ‘maximum objectivity’, an objectivity which is to supplement the limited perspectivistic subjectivity of Nietzsche. Faith in God can be formulated as objective since it is transformed itself into the experience of pure, structural objectivity. Faith is no longer the affirmation of something beyond a given set of present facts but instead becomes one with factuality (*Tatsächlichkeit*) as such: it becomes, as Moses puts it, the pure receptivity to the pre-reflexive and non-conceptual factuality of the world. Revelation becomes alternatively, as Cohen puts it, ‘the very eventfulness of the present’.<sup>38</sup>

Built upon this purely structural experience of Revelation, a structural or ontological event upon which an episodic Revelation within the course of history and individual biography is nonetheless also articulated, the character of Redemption in Rosenzweig can be understood.<sup>39</sup> Redemption constitutes namely a further modality of this dynamic between ‘subjectivity’ and ‘objectivity’ determinative for Creation and Revelation, and which for Rosenzweig constitutes ‘theology’ or ‘religion’ in its most primal form. The fundament of this religion is Revelation as the moment of passivity and receptivity in which objectivity is revealed from beyond the limits of its perspectivism. Redemption represents the mirror image of this moment of

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<sup>38</sup> Cohen, *Elevations* p76

<sup>39</sup> See principally (GMW 113-121) principally for this episodic revelation.

Revelation, in which the event of Revelation is reflected back, via and as man's vision, upon the World. Subjectivity is not the pure spontaneous source of objectivity, but contains the moment of 'faith' as the passive reception of objectivity beyond its own spontaneity. Revelation signifies this moment of passive reception over and above the subject. Redemption on the contrary 'inverses' Revelation, as Rubinstein puts it: it signifies in reverse as the subsequently active engagement of this subject with the objective world.<sup>40</sup> Once opened to this objectivity, Man who was formerly enclosed within this *Weltanschauung* now contributes to the further development of this objectivity. Revelation is the concentration into the transitory moment of the objectivity of the world to the subject. Redemption is the inverse process by which Man brings stability, permanence to objectivity, redeeming it of its merely momentary character. Rather than turning within his own circle in self-immersion, Man now aims, in a manner we shall explore, towards cultivating objectivity into enduring 'Being', indeed endowing it with 'immortality' and 'eternity'. The momentary appearance of objectivity in revelation across which God calls to Man is still characterised by 'phenomenality', argues Rosenzweig, and must be redeemed of this as such insofar as Man must endow it with the 'substance' of his own soul.

This inversion of Man from self-enclosure and rebellion against the world towards engagement with the world in order to effect the 'Growth of the Kingdom' takes on two senses. 'Maximum subjectivity', that is, inverts into 'maximum objectivity' in two ways. The Nietzschean self immured in himself now turns towards other selves initiating a movement which culminates in universal fraternity. The *growth* of Redemption is here understood as the *spread* of Redemption from one individual to another and then another, producing ultimately universal fraternity: 'it glides from one bearer to the next one, from one neighbour to the next neighbour. It is not satisfied until it has paced off the whole orbit of creation.' (SR235, SE299) The Love of one's neighbour is viewed as something contagious, something akin to a virus which is passed on from one body to the next, in which there is an 'intensification' of the 'soul of the individual' into 'the soul of all'. (SR252, SE320) Rosenzweig uses the image of humanity and nature united within a single choir of praise for God's work, praise directed to God: the choral totality is produced from the chain of relations from one individual to the next . . . and so on, proceeding as 'a fugue for two voices, joined by more and more instruments; finally everything gathers, with the We, in the uniform choral tempo of the multi-voiced finale.' (SR237, SE301) This one global We is an eschatological goal. Yet

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<sup>40</sup> Rubinstein, Episode of Jewish Romanticism p52

although it is an eschatological goal, this 'We' is already in Rosenzweig's eyes exemplified in the Jewish community. The Jewish community is exemplary insofar as in its anticipation of Redemption in the infinitely renewed cycle of its ritual calendar, it already embodies the eternity of Redemption in time: 'It lives in its own redemption. It has anticipated eternity. The future is the driving power in the circuit of its year. Its rotation originates, so to speak, not in a thrust but in a pull. The present passes not because the past prods it on but because the future snatches it towards itself.' (SR328, SE411) The movement of the ritual cycle in the Jewish community is not a question of inertia: it is the undiminished anticipation of Redemption which provides the momentum through which this cycle ever repeats itself.

The second sense of 'Growth' is more vitalistic: Man completes the organic vitalist impulse of nature, creating a new set of 'organisms' to a second degree through the vitality of his awakened soul. Rosenzweig applies the organic model and vitalist impulse within nature to all possible things: 'everything, yes indeed everything can be alive, not only living beings but also institutions, communities, feelings, things, works.' (SR237, SE301) All things can be 'alive' as the products of either individual or collective 'souls'. It is worth commenting here that this notion of Redemption is thoroughly 'this-worldly'. Rosenzweig is not concerned with life beyond existence but, as one commentator put it, with the 'life behind existence.'<sup>41</sup> The passage from Creation to Revelation to Redemption in effect is the narrative, if it could be called as such, of the progressive emergence and articulation of the implicit 'vitality' of life. For Rosenzweig 'the World has yet to exist': Redemption signifies existence in the completion of its 'vitality', its organism to a second degree, and not any existence beyond it: 'Life is consummated in the one-and-all; it becomes wholly alive.' (SR386, SE492) It is this becoming 'wholly alive' which is for Rosenzweig the goal of Redemption.

Indeed just as there is no existence beyond the present one there is ultimately in fact no narrative at work in the *Star*: alternatively, the narrative which Rosenzweig presents us can be collapsed into a single moment or event. Rosenzweig himself states near the end of the *Star* that all three episodes, Creation, Revelation and Redemption, can indeed be collapsed into the one episode of Revelation:

In this Part, creation was no longer proto-cosmos for us, but rather the content of revelation. Just so redemption was not yet hyper-cosmos. Rather, we took it also only as the content of revelation. As content of revelation, creation turned, for us, from world to occurrence, to a having-already-occurred, and redemption likewise from hyper-cosmos to an occurrence, a still-to-occur. Thus revelation gathers everything

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<sup>41</sup> Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p106

into its presentness; not only is it conscious of itself; nay, everything is in it. (SR255, SE322)

We are not, in other words, dealing with a narrative but as, Gordon recognises, something similar to the temporal ecstasies of Heidegger's model of de-formalised time.<sup>42</sup> Redemption, as well as Creation, is absorbed into the structure of the 'lived' present of Revelation as its structural past and structural future. The past, that is, does not happen before and the future after the present moment. Implicated in the present moment is both the horizon of the past and of the future as structural to this present moment. The past variously signifies in the present either as the 'grammar' of Creation ever renewed in the 'speech' of the present, or as support for the present in the 'weight' of always having been, or as the old world configuration in the process of being surpassed in its re-creation. The future of anticipated Redemption belongs already to the present as modality of the present, insofar as man is to take on the task of Redemption in reaching out from his self-enclosure towards the world, donating to it the 'substantiality' of his 'soul' in each and every present moment in a fashion we shall examine in more detail.

Indeed although all three elements, God, Man and World are to begin in utter separation, there is one characteristic which already unites them from the start: that of their 'vitality' (*Lebendigkeit*): 'on this point all three are the same. . . Not God alone but man and the world too live in the internal vitality of their own nature.' (SR84, SE108) Yet this 'internal vitality' already takes them beyond their respective interiors. The 'vitality' of God is that of his infinite activity of which nonetheless his infinite essence in its own 'vitality' always has the measure, or the capacity of its universality to remain ever unscathed despite the constant shock of new particularity which this activity occasions: this is a dynamic into which we could already collapse the 'vitality' of the universal world logos or spirit in its 'vital present' ever in the process of renewal. Man for his part opposes the 'vitality' of his unique individuality against the impersonal World which would attempt to absorb it: a 'vitality' which he nonetheless bestows upon this World, and as such *redeems* this World. Given this shared 'vitality' as starting point, the cosmological narrative of the overcoming of separation becomes problematic, insofar as Rosenzweig tells us from the very outset that already 'all boundaries and distinctions appear to blur'. (SR84, SE108) The different 'vitalities' flow into the one single 'vitality' of the present. All different moments and characters of Rosenzweig's narrative collapse into this 'vitality' as its modalities or adverbial complements: the 6 points

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid p197

of Rosenzweig's star collapse into a single point. What vitality ultimately signifies here is the fact that the World is at each moment an event: that the World *is* not, but always *happens*. Rosenzweig's vision of Redemption cannot be isolated as a discrete episode, but rather represents a part of the collapsible, if equally 'open', system which constitutes Rosenzweig's 'religion' of the structural appearance or *Ereignis* of the present.<sup>43</sup>

### Philosophy and Judaism: Correlation or Displacement?

Both messianism and philosophy, in other words, take on an entirely transformed character within Rosenzweig's idiosyncratically articulated 'primal religion'. The question naturally arises as to how to interpret such a transformation. Scholarship on Rosenzweig presents us with two principle alternatives.

Significant for us is the fact that Rosenzweig is often considered as a pair with Levinas when it comes to this question. The eschatological dimension in both their works is most often considered in light of the question of the relation between philosophy and its 'other'. More specifically, it is considered in light of the question of the relation between 'Judaism' and 'Philosophy' in what could be called perhaps in broad terms post-Hegelian thought, although Kant and Schelling are often called as witnesses. They are considered as emblematic of a changed relation between philosophy and religion in which the latter is no longer considered as that to be incorporated and, in the process, superseded by a philosophy which believes it can comprehend and articulate the essence of religion in more suitable fashion than religion itself. The emphasis in such recent thought falls namely on the incompleteness of philosophy, and the need of philosophy for that which is in excess of it to supplement it. Rather than seeking universal comprehension, philosophy must henceforth take its cue from 'incomprehensible realities'.<sup>44</sup> Judaism has become, through one means or another, the privileged bearer of this excess. The works of both Levinas and Rosenzweig are often both considered in tandem as exemplary of this relation between 'philosophy' and 'Judaism'. The eschatological dimension at work in both is regarded as demonstrative of this relation, a relation indeed regarded as necessary and as natural for both 'philosophy' and 'Judaism'.

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<sup>43</sup>The notion of Rosenzweig's system as 'open' comes from Caygill, H 'Critical Theory and the New Thinking in the Early Frankfurt School and Religion' in *The Early Frankfurt School and Religion* ed. by Geuss, R, Kohlenback, M (London, Macmillan, 2005) pp140-156. It is opposed to the 'closed' totality of Hegel into which all nodes are absorbed rather than forming a configuration, and in which all is already predicted

<sup>44</sup>Gibbs, *Correlations* p34

This relation has been formulated in parallel terms amongst diverse sources. Gibbs unites both thinkers in their expression of what he calls the necessary ‘correlation’ between Judaism and Philosophy, or in more paradigmatic terms between ‘Hebrew’ and ‘Greek’, in which both come into relation with each other and are changed in the process. The relation between Judaism and Philosophy is envisaged as a reciprocal, two way relation of two distinct modes of thought in which Judaism is itself considered as a specific mode of philosophising: a relation of ‘philosophy reaching out toward philosophy in order to provide it with what it cannot get from itself’.<sup>45</sup> Philosophy is re-orientated by Judaism, argues Gibbs, and in the process gains resources for bringing itself into relation with that always exceeds its horizon of comprehension. Meanwhile Judaism, in bringing itself into correlation with philosophy, must itself undergo transformation. Specifically, it must undergo universalisation: its central tropes as the product of a particular religion must consent to being translated into the universalisable concepts of philosophical discourse, specifically that of existential discourse. Gibbs writes in particular of the ‘need to free Rosenzweig from the constraints of Jewish sectarianism.’ ‘Rosenzweig’s use of theological concepts’ Gibbs argues, ‘depends on the universally accessible, human experience.’<sup>46</sup>

To the notion of the ‘correlation’ of Judaism and philosophy as the background against which the philosophical construction of messianism takes place we could add the concept of ‘translation’ of Judaism into philosophy, a notion proffered among others by Cohen. Here the relation between philosophy and Judaism in Rosenzweig and Levinas is expressed as the dialectic in Judaism towards universalism and translation into philosophy guided by the impulse within Jewish messianism beyond the particular salvation of the Jewish people towards universal salvation and universal justice.<sup>47</sup> Ajzenstat, with regards to Levinas, makes substantially the same argument.<sup>48</sup> Anckaert writes in similar terms of the dynamic of ‘translation’ at work in both Levinas and Rosenzweig, one which takes place in order to effectuate a series of ‘displacements’ in philosophical discourse. Via this translation a shift in philosophy’s centre of balance - from ontology to ethics, unity to plurality, cognition to love, freedom to responsibility - takes place. This ‘translation’ in view of these displacements in turn determines both their work as eschatological: ‘Rosenzweig and Levinas are two Jewish thinkers who introduce a shift into philosophical discourse. The core of philosophical

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<sup>45</sup> Gibbs, *Correlations* p172

<sup>46</sup> *ibid* p20

<sup>47</sup> Cohen, *Elevations*: especially the first chapter on ‘Jewish Election in the Thought of Franz Rosenzweig’ p3-39

<sup>48</sup> Ajzenstat, *O Driven Back to the Text: the Premodern Sources of Levinas’ Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh, Dunesque University Press, 2001)

questioning is no longer located in ontology, but in ethics. Presence is replaced with eschatology.<sup>49</sup> Plüss, within the German tradition of scholarship offers a variation of this model. He prefers the term ‘inspiration’ to ‘translation’ of Judaism’ which suggests that philosophy is merely articulating within its own language in secondary fashion an already formed notion. Philosophy is framed rather as a ‘response’ to the ‘challenge’ which the model of Jewish messianism represents. This is formulated as the ‘inspiration’ of philosophy by its other which Judaism does not so much embody as has more facility in expressing.<sup>50</sup> Philosophy in its ‘inspiration’ by this other must turn to Judaism to make use of it or enlist its services in making sense of this inspiration.<sup>51</sup>

Within the francophone tradition of scholarship, there is notably the work of Gérard Bensussan, in which the attempt is made to grapple with the diverse appearances of messianism in modern European philosophy.<sup>52</sup> Coming in for critique in this work is particularly the secularised branch of messianism represented by the likes of Hegel and Marx, as the distortion of the original eschatological impulse in the translation into historical teleology, as history’s *immanent* dynamis, of the eternal which *transcends* history. With this strand of philosophical messianism, Bensussan contrasts that found in nascent form in Kant and Schelling and brought to fruition by the likes of Rosenzweig, Benjamin and Levinas. By virtue of the envisaging of messianism by the latter thinkers according to a broadly conceived paradigm of the ‘lived time’ of subjectivity, ‘an essential messianicity of human time’, in which the subjective experience of time is structured essentially in view of messianic expectation, as opposed to the ‘objective’ historical time of Hegel indifferent to subjective experience, their diverse formulations correspond apparently more authentically to the original messianic inspiration coming from the Jewish tradition across its history.<sup>53</sup> On the back of this, the principal argument of Bensussan’s work is more or less identical to that of Gibb and Cohen. Messianism and philosophy, he argues, tend necessarily towards each other: it is in the nature of messianism in Jewish thought to exceed its culturally specific boundaries whilst, given that messianism is the essential structure of subjective time, it is equally a philosophical task to articulate it in rigorous fashion.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Anckaert, Critique p107

<sup>50</sup> Plüss *Das Messianische: Judentum und Philosophie im Werk Emmanuel Levinas* (Stuttgart, W Kohlhammer GmbH, 2001) p27

<sup>51</sup> Ibid p102

<sup>52</sup> Bensussan, G *Le Temps Messianique: Temps Historique et Temps Vécu* (Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, Paris, 2001)

<sup>53</sup> Ibid p11

<sup>54</sup> Ibid

‘Correlation’, ‘translation’ of Judaism into philosophy, or alternatively ‘inspiration’ of philosophy by its other for which Judaism stands as cipher: the eschatological horizon which opens in the work of both Levinas and Rosenzweig can be understood as the product of this relation between Judaism and philosophy variously defined. This is a dynamic in which ‘Judaism’ imposes itself upon ‘philosophy’ as an imperative in face of which ‘philosophy’ is more or less *passive*. More passive in the case of Gibbs: the impulse towards the translation of Judaism into philosophy is provided by the former. Gibbs writes of the ‘inherently Jewish quality of this striving for philosophy’. ‘On the other side’ he adds, ‘philosophy stands in greatest need of its other.’ Judaism in its ability to strive towards philosophy is so good as to provide philosophy with what it needs but which it is at a loss to find via its own resources. There is, Gibbs writes, a ‘deeply Jewish justification for the task of correlating Jewish and philosophical concepts’.<sup>55</sup> We are not told of the deeply philosophical justification for the task of this correlation, and indeed the pathos of this correlation results to a large extent from its gratuity from a strictly rational perspective.<sup>56</sup> Similarly for Plüss, philosophy is framed in terms of the ‘passivity’ of ‘inspiration’: philosophy is compelled to respond to that which it cannot fully articulate in its own language, a philosophy which indeed cannot even fully articulate this compulsion. Philosophy always comes after ‘Judaism’, as a response to the imperative for which Judaism is the cipher: ‘Levinas’ thought is a messianic, responsive thought (ein messianisch-antwortendes Denken) which does not begin with itself, but is rather ordered, compelled to thought.’<sup>57</sup>

In being brought into proximity with Judaism, the essential passivity of philosophy before an *imperative* coming from outside it is revealed: in other words, what unites the diverse articulations of the relation between Judaism and philosophy in which philosophy is more or less a passive partner is a certain vision of *ethics*. Both philosophy and Judaism correlate in their respective movements towards each other by virtue of the *ethical* nature of the imperative which animates them both. All commentators are united in their appraisal of the eschatological dimension as by its nature ethical in the work of both Rosenzweig and Levinas. For Bensussan, messianism in Levinas and Rosenzweig, among others, is structured according to the practical reason native to the European philosophical tradition; and yet the opening of the eschatological dimension is to be more than a rational postulate. It presupposes the irruption within consciousness and thus philosophy of messianic time as the lived,

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<sup>55</sup>Gibbs, *Correlations* p172

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid* p172

<sup>57</sup>Plüss, *Das Messianische* p358



structural experience of time, an experience which brings home the urgency and responsibility of acting to bring about the messianic age at each moment. The ethical values pertaining to messianism, according to Bensussan, are those of 'impatience' and extreme 'vigilance'.<sup>58</sup> 'The messianic Today is a now or never. It is qualitatively different from the linear future because it is not the anticipation or calculation of a historical realisation of a vow or promise.' Each moment must imperatively be lived as if it were the irruption of the messianic. The coming of the kingdom in each moment is not simply a possibility to be expected but represents an exigency in which consciousness is called to exceed the present towards the messianic future of Redemption.<sup>59</sup> In less dramatic fashion, Gibbs observes the parallel structural dynamic in Levinas and Rosenzweig in which Redemption is the culmination of the process which begins with an isolated self and which culminates in universal fraternity.<sup>60</sup> Moses attests from the outset that his reading of Rosenzweig is inspired by Levinas' ethics of the face to face relation, and it is Levinas who indeed writes the preface to Mose's work in these terms.<sup>61</sup> Habib focuses on the aspect of the parallel structure of the fixating 'address' of the other at work in Rosenzweig and Levinas.<sup>62</sup> Formulating the thesis in a weaker form, Hollander understands Levinas as rendering explicit the 'ethical potential' in Rosenzweig's categories. Likewise for Anckaert Levinas is read as responding to and refining the more inchoate ethical element in Rosenzweig's text, that of the movement in which ego leaves its state of primordial 'separation' and solipsistic self-enclosure to enter into relation with that exterior to it. Levinas, using the tools of phenomenology not available to Rosenzweig, is more able to frame with greater immediacy the ethical exigency of the address of the other which somewhat exceeded Rosenzweig and yet remains implicit in his work.<sup>63</sup>

Within the scholarship on Rosenzweig, however, another tendency can be discerned, posing an alternative to this model of correlation, translation or inspiration. In the first place, the correlation of Rosenzweig and Levinas across a shared ethical imperative has been brought into question by at least one commentator. Against any notion of a rendering explicit of any 'ethical potential', to understand Rosenzweig's model of Redemption in light of Levinas' ethics of difference and non-identity, argues Gordon, would be to distort it. Gordon explores how certain of Rosenzweig's ideas on Redemption put him 'dramatically at odds

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<sup>58</sup> Bensussan, G 'L'impatience Messianique' in *Lignes* 27 (2008) pp9-30 (pp22-26)

<sup>59</sup> Bensussan, *Temps Messianique* p131

<sup>60</sup> Gibbs, *Correlations* p21

<sup>61</sup> Moses, S *Systeme et Revelation: la philosophie de Franz Rosenzweig 2<sup>nd</sup> ed* (Paris, 2003, Bayard) p18

<sup>62</sup> Habib (2005) *Levinas et Rosenzweig: Philosophie de la Revelation* (Paris, PUF, 2005)

<sup>63</sup> Anckaert, Critique p83 Rosenzweig still uses overly objective and transcendental terms for the other and is thus not able to fully conceptualize 'the concrete need of the other, or the other's suffering.'

with new developments in contemporary Jewish ethics, especially those of Levinas.<sup>64</sup> The imperative to which Rosenzweig responds in his vision of Redemption in this interpretation is not principally of Jewish or ethical inspiration as such. It corresponds, according to Gordon, much more to something approaching a Heideggerian notion of authenticity. If Gordon is correct, then the link between philosophy and Judaism as well as the notion of philosophy as organised according to an imperative for which Judaism stands as cipher upon which the model of correlation rests would lose its basis.

There is, moreover, a discernable tendency in the scholarship on Rosenzweig of paying less attention to Rosenzweig's vision of Redemption as the site of the *correlation* between Judaism and Philosophy than the site of a certain *displacement*. The earliest instance of this can be found in Scholem, who notes some reservations towards Rosenzweig's formulation of Redemption. Scholem praises Rosenzweig for introducing new life into Jewish theology after 'vacuity' and 'insignificance' of pre-First World War Jewish theology, characterized by the abstractions and eviscerations of liberal theology.<sup>65</sup> He nonetheless criticises Rosenzweig's formulation for depriving Judaism of the 'anarchic element' involved in the immanent expectation of the arrival of the Messiah, the 'breath of fresh air' in the well ordered house of Judaism: 'by his use of the doctrine of anticipation of redemption in Jewish life, a concept as fascinating as it is problematic, Rosenzweig took a decided and hostile stance against the one open door in the otherwise neatly ordered house of Judaism. He opposed the theory of catastrophe contained in messianic apocalypticism which might be considered the point at which even today theocratic and bourgeois modes of life stand irreconcilably opposed.'<sup>66</sup> Redemption takes on a role in Rosenzweig's work which does not in any way envisage how its inherent 'destructive potential' might render problematic Judaism with regards to its legal and ritual aspects, the possibility that the law may only be for an unredeemed world, a possibility which inspired the scandalous inversion of the law by the likes of Sabbati Sevi and indeed which also inspires certain antinomian tendencies in Saint Paul. Redemption is rather integrated, made into a functional part of the legal aspect of Judaism: 'The power of redemption seems to be built into the clockwork of life lived in the light of revelation, thought

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<sup>64</sup> Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p201 Gordon points to a number of divergences: where the 'difference' of the other is exalted by Levinas, the 'familiarity' of the neighbour is held to by Rosenzweig; where Levinas emphasis the fashion in which the relation with the other disintegrates 'totality', Rosenzweig aims towards a communal 'holism'. Next to Levinas' 'otherworldliness' is opposed Rosenzweig's fundamental 'worldliness'.

<sup>65</sup> Scholem *The Messianic Idea in Judaism and Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality* (London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1971) p323

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

more as restlessness than as potential destructiveness.<sup>67</sup> Messianic hope is no longer an alive and immanent expectation but rather becomes a structural component in the functioning of an economy. The continual expectation of Redemption, that is, becomes less the end of Jewish ritual life than its means: the former serves to enliven the latter and ensure its cyclical renewal. Beyond this however, Scholem argues, Rosenzweig demonstrates a certain indifference towards Redemption as anything more than a structural possibility the anticipation of which ensures the persistence, the ever renewed repetition, of Jewish ritual life. Redemption, in other words, *collapses* into its own anticipation. It undergoes domestication or 'neutralisation': 'Rosenzweig sought . . . to neutralize it in a higher order of truth', that of the ritual cycle, and such Judaism takes on a 'strangely church like aspect'.<sup>68</sup>

It could of course be argued that Scholem's critique represents less an attempt to advocate for the suppressed eschatological dimension in Judaism, than the posing of one specific eschatological vision against another within the history of Jewish thought. Scholem has received critical attention precisely for his over-emphasising of the destructive and apocalyptic element of Jewish Messianism.<sup>69</sup> Yet more recent interpretations of the *Star of Redemption* allow us to put Scholem's misgivings into perspective. Scholem himself attributes Rosenzweig's reduction of the eschatological dimension to the functional element of the legal and ritual framework of Judaism to his belonging to 'a very old and very powerful movement in Judaism.'<sup>70</sup> Other scholars who have observed similarly this element of displacement in Rosenzweig's concept of Redemption have emphasised rather its innovative and contemporary aspect. To be placed beside Scholem's notion of the neutralisation of the eschatological dimension, is Mendes-Flohr's observation of the 'de-messianisation of eschatology' or 'de-ontologising of messianism' at work in Rosenzweig. Rosenzweig's concept of Redemption is framed as a rejection of the tutelage of his mentor, the historian Meinecke, and a certain typically pre-First World War optimism concerning the ethical course of history. Hope for Redemption in history is abandoned and thus Rosenzweig takes refuge in the modalities of everyday life, specifically an existential analytic of the ritual life of Judaism which in this ever repeated cycle opens a view upon the eternity of Redemption. This return to Judaism and to eschatological anticipation, however, transforms the latter. Without possibility of fulfilment in history, it is reduced to a 'meta-historical' and 'existential' *structure* of

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid

<sup>68</sup> Ibid

<sup>69</sup> See Handelman *Fragments of redemption: Jewish Thought and Literary Theory in Benjamin, Scholem, and Levinas* (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1991)

<sup>70</sup> Scholem, *Messianic Idea* p323

everyday experience.<sup>71</sup> The future as the expectation of redemption which could come at any moment becomes a part of the 'life horizon' of our experience in the present; and yet its significance is exhausted in this role. Redemption, as the eternal beyond history, becomes merely an existential *posture*, an attitude assumed within this world in the participation in the eternal cycle of ritual life. Mendes-Flohr points towards the same dynamic at work in Rosenzweig as does Scholem. For that matter he also points towards the same movement observed by Bensussan of the retreat of messianism from objective historical time to 'lived' time. In other words, the appeal by Rosenzweig to the notion of Redemption as an 'existential structure' signifies that we are not dealing with different possible interpretations of Redemption from within the Jewish tradition, but rather with a relation between Judaism and contemporary philosophy, indeed a certain displacement effect by the latter upon the former.

Gordon goes one step further in this line of interpretation of Redemption in Rosenzweig, developing Mendes-Flohr's appraisal of Redemption as an existential structure of experience, and bringing out the radically different character of this notion of Redemption from any already proposed within the schemas of the Jewish tradition.<sup>72</sup> Rosenzweig in proto-typical Heideggerian fashion, Gordon argues, conceives of Redemption 'not as world-transcendence but as a distinctive being-in-the-world'.<sup>73</sup> In a manner which we will have to further clarify, Redemption loses its character as anticipated event in order to become rather a structure of experience. Redemption represents a de-formalised temporal ekstasis in the Heideggerian model: Redemption signifies as the de-formalised future horizon of experience in the same fashion as death for Heidegger. Redemption 'comes eternally', and in becoming this de-formalised temporal *horizon* of that which is eternally coming it already fulfils its function.<sup>74</sup> Gordon coins the term 'redemption-in-the-world' in order to come to terms with Rosenzweig's innovation, and gives of it the following assessment:

'Because he was a modern, post-Nietzschean philosopher, for him redemption could no longer mean, as it had once for others, the metaphysical move from temporality to eternity. Redemption was now constrained to appear within the life-horizon alone, as a mode of factual existence within time, although not fully of time.'<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Mendes-Flohr 'Rosenzweig and the Crisis of Historicism' in Mendes-Flohr (ed) *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (Hanover, University Press of New England 1988) p330

<sup>72</sup>The most cited being that of Scholem according to the restorative versus utopian strand, or the division between the rationalist, Talmudic Rabbinic strand of messianism, the popular apocalyptic strand or the messianism of the Kabbalah.

<sup>73</sup>Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p5

<sup>74</sup>Ibid p195

<sup>75</sup>Ibid p192

Rosenzweig's notion of Redemption is of the nature of a certain 'Nietzschean' modulation. It must contribute to the construction of meaning within the finite world rather than exceed it and drain it of meaning after the fashion of Christianity in Nietzsche's reckoning. Redemption becomes strictly of this world, a modality of its appearance. It is 'a mode of existence within time' yet it is 'not fully of time'. This not 'yet fully of time' is highly problematic. We will have to undertake to understand this notion of an eternity which 'must happen within time' yet which is nonetheless 'eternal'. What for the moment is significant is that, as being rendered as a mode of 'factual existence', there is 'an anticipation of secularism in Rosenzweigian redemption'. Redemption, Gordon continues, 'becomes a lived condition rather than a specific event surpassing the horizon of experience. One particularity of this idea was that it stood in uncomfortable proximity to the atheism it denied.'<sup>76</sup>

Next to the interpretation of the eschatological horizon in Rosenzweig as the natural and indeed necessary 'correlation' of philosophy and Judaism, as the very fulfilment of Judaism and philosophy, there are certain misgivings or questions raised regarding Rosenzweig's formulation of Redemption. Namely there are certain misgivings or raised eyebrows over what could be called a displacement of Judaism, a displacement revealed in formulations such as the domestication, economisation, neutralisation, de-messianisation, de-ontologisation or secularisation of eschatology. What can be understood from Gordon's position is even more radical. 'Redemption-in the-world' is neither 'philosophy' nor 'Judaism': philosophy is displaced by Judaism as much as Judaism by philosophy, and what results is a structure unrecognisable to both. We are presented with two quite contrary positions. For our own part, we are quite decisively in favour of the latter position. We shall explain why in taking a closer look at the moment of Redemption in Rosenzweig's cosmological narrative.

### Rosenzweig, Messianism and Parody

As we saw, the correlation thesis bases itself on the notion that Judaism imposes an imperative, in particular an ethical imperative, on philosophy. Philosophy is in passivity drawn towards that which exceeds it and which it is not fully able to articulate 'without remainder'. It is worth then questioning into the nature of the imperative which Judaism imposes on philosophy, the imperative of which messianism is the embodiment. It is in fact

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid p235/6

here that we find the greatest proof of the displacement thesis. Just what exactly is the imperative which messianism, according to Rosenzweig, imposes upon philosophy?

As we saw, the transition from Revelation to Redemption occurs for Rosenzweig at the point where Man must step beyond the moment of intimacy in Revelation towards the openness of the world. Revelation is an intimate moment between man and God, where God calls to man across creation. It is a relation of two interlocutors which excludes all others (SR207, SE264). Yet the response of the soul to God is not in fact returned to God, for the command of God to love is not first and foremost the commandment to love Him. Rather God's commandment diverts us away from Him. As God reveals Himself through a part of the world, so God calls us towards love for that same part of the World. As God opened Himself from self-enclosure to reveal himself to Man, so Man opens himself to reach out towards the world. Man reaches out towards the world in order to redeem it. The task to spread the initial transitory moment of fulfilment in Revelation is delegated to Man. After completing the work of Revelation God steps back and takes on the role of something akin to an overseer. The 'growth' of Redemption is primarily the construction of a relationship between Man and the World in which Man functions as a cultivator of the world, bringing out the potential for Redemption inherent to it. In Rosenzweig's text this action of cultivation goes by the title of 'Love of Neighbour': 'Love thy Neighbour. That is, as Jew and Christian assure us, the embodiment of all commandments. With this commandment, the soul is declared of age, departs the paternal home of divine love, and sets forth into the world.' (SR205, SE262) This 'love of Neighbour' then is the imperative arising from 'Judaism' which re-orientates philosophy. It is this imperative which transforms philosophy, and which can henceforth no longer rest within self-enclosure either in the form of a Hegelian all-comprehending universal, or more importantly in this context, in the self-immersion of its own *Weltanschauung*.

We have noted already that this 'Love of Neighbour' is considered most often as an ethical imperative which provides the basis for the structural parallel between Levinas and Rosenzweig and for 'Judaism' and 'Philosophy'. Undoubtedly Levinas is greatly influenced here by Rosenzweig. The ethical interpretation of this imperative would seem to be justified in light of the importance given by Rosenzweig to collective participation and communality. We could point out, however, several quite fundamental differences between Rosenzweig's conception and that ultimately of Levinas. In the first place Rosenzweig adheres to a more literal meaning of what constitutes a neighbour than does Levinas: 'the neighbour designates, in the Hebrew original as well as in the Greek, the *nearest* neighbour . . . the one who is

nighest to me, at least at this moment.’ (SR218, SĒ278) The neighbour is the one who is nearest to me in the simplest spatial sense of the word. The idea of the neighbour has none of the other-worldliness that the other takes on in Levinas. In fact the Neighbour for Rosenzweig is thoroughly mundane: ‘the neighbour is only a representative. He is loved not for his own sake, nor for his beautiful eyes, but only because he just happens to be standing there.’ (SR218, SĒ278) Indeed Rosenzweig’s use of anthropomorphic imagery here is misleading: it is clear that the concept of the neighbour is not restricted to other *people*: ‘Love goes out to whatever is nighest to it . . . and thereby in truth to the all-inclusive concept of all men and all things which could ever assume the place of being its nighest neighbour. In the final analysis it goes out to everything, to the world.’ (SR218, SĒ278) The individual in love reaches out both to ‘all men’ and to ‘all things’. Rosenzweig’s idea of what constitutes a Neighbour is decidedly less closed than that of Levinas, insofar as for the latter the neighbour is restricted to other humans. Gordon we noted has quite decisively argued against any rapprochement between Rosenzweig’s ‘love of neighbour’ and its Levinasian’ variant.<sup>77</sup>

It is worth looking at this moment of ‘love of neighbour’ in greater detail. The love of one’s neighbour represents the task of Redemption insofar as it involves fashioning the World into an embodiment within the present of the eternity which is to come. Man achieves this by donating to this part of the World a piece of his ‘soul’. Elsewhere, Rosenzweig writes of the creation of ‘factuality’ which the task of Redemption demands: ‘whatever is still attached directly to its beginning is not yet factual in the full sense, for the beginning whence it originated could reabsorb it.’ (SR242, SĒ306) In Creation, objects stood under the sign of mere ‘phenomenality’. Objects in Creation have no significance in themselves, only via the general categories under which they stand. These categories are not eternal, moreover, but are temporary and indeed essentially momentary. To transform a part of the world into a cipher for eternity, to ensoul it, is to create for it a stable, substantive meaning. In what way, therefore, is the individual able to orientate himself towards the World so as to redeem it of its phenomenality?

It is in the holistic perspective which the individual can provide, integrating the object into his soul, into his singular ‘fate’ which he receives and cultivates. Rosenzweig appeals to a certain theory of daemonism to outline the redemptive potential of man: ‘Once man is

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<sup>77</sup>Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p200-1 Gordon emphasises likewise the worldly character of this love in Rosenzweig in face of the other in Levinas as the opening of the horizon of transcendence. He frames the love of neighbour in Rosenzweig is much more of a case of resting within the immanence of the World rather than seeking flight beyond it. He notes also that rather than difference between self and other, this imperative in Rosenzweig is rather more holistic, envisaging the absorption of all into a single communitarian impulse.

possessed by his daemon, he has received “direction” for his whole life. His will is now destined to run in this direction which directs him once and for all.’ (SR213, SE271) Daemonism, from its classical formulation to its reinvigoration at the hands of Hamann, Herder and Goethe, suggests generally an indeterminate fate bestowed upon each individual, yet for which this individual takes responsibility and renders determinate. The daemon remains ambiguously between external and internal, divine and human: a ‘fate’ given by the gods or guardian divinity as in Heraclitus; and yet at the same time the very entelechy of the individual soul.<sup>78</sup> The classical schema, however, is complicated by Rosenzweig for whom the contact with the divine in Revelation is something of a second or re-birth of the soul, a re-birth occurring with each moment. In any case, each awakened individual soul is to cultivate his daemonic fate in the passionate engagement with the world. He is to become form, integrating the caprice of whatever the World presents it in Revelation into its ‘configuration’ of his soul in something akin to an aesthetic harmony between form and content. Via the creation of a form, a ‘configuration’ for the soul, the soul integrates all the fragmented and disparate aspects of life, ‘the world of art, of law, of work, of faith, of nature, of the spirit *e tutti quanti*’ into the one form of its life or fully articulated daemonic fate. (GMW82) It is as such that the soul heightens further the element of organic teleology, of that ‘forming itself from within’, in nature. The subject can act as a redeeming force in the world in heightening the element of organicity which is already inherent to it because it structures its own life as such: the soul must attain ‘firmness and structure’. (SR211, SE269) Art serves as means towards this daemonic cultivation, considered as a series of forms for life whose role it is the spectator or reader to absorb and integrate, creating of his own life as its own particular form. This progressive integration is the locus of the contagious ‘growth’ or spreading of Redemption outlined above. The goal is a form-filled life, in which the soul develops an ‘artistry’ concerning how to fashion each ‘individual detail’ into the form in general. Art ‘structures passion’, writes Rosenzweig, it ‘forges the ring of life’ for the soul. It makes of it, that is, its own self-referential embodiment of eternity, in which the ‘soul renews itself in itself.’ (Sie erneuert sich in sich selbst, Und die Kunst schmiedet ihr diesen Ring des Lebens.) (SR377, SE475)

This vision of Redemption takes as its point of departure the thought of two ‘pagans’: Goethe and Nietzsche. Rosenzweig cites Goethe’s ‘pagan prayer’ to his ‘own fate’, the prayer of ‘non-belief’: it is a prayer in which the soul recognises his own limitation, or delimitation,

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<sup>78</sup> See Nicholls, *A Goethe’s Concept of the Daemonic: After the Ancients* (Rochester NY, Camden House, 2006) for an overview of this concept across its history.



as bound to a personal fate; and yet via this fate, via making of his soul a configuration ‘formed from within’, there is the recognition of this soul as a ‘microcosm’ of the world configuration as a whole. (SE287, SE475) Nietzsche is cited as model beside Goethe as principal representative of the model of ‘new philosopher’, the priest of the Church to come, what after Schelling Rosenzweig calls the Johannine Church, in which sacred and profane, interiority and exteriority, religion and life will be one. Nietzsche is rendered as the most notable failure of the attempt to fully realise this vision, whilst Goethe is rather given pride of place as the unrepeatable example of one who achieved the unachievable. (SR286-7, SE360) Goethe succeeded namely in balancing between the two abysses on either side of the path towards this new religion of ‘life’: on the one hand, that of falling into subjective licence and self-absorption; on the other hand, that of the destructive impulse of one who negates all, including himself, in search of ‘the most distant One’ or in a precipitous craving of Redemption. Goethe manages to steer clear of either precipice and become a ‘pure son of the earth’, utterly self-concerned and yet fully receptive to the world; Nietzsche falls victim to both dangers, indicating the extent to which they are mutually implicated.

Greater consideration of Rosenzweig’s relation to Goethe would here be well worth the effort: worthy of attention in particular is how much of the Spinoza and Herder informed pantheism and the early Goethe’s *natürliche Religion* remains in this daemonic vision. Does the daemon mediate the human and divine across nature or simply the human with a divinely infused nature? Insofar as concerns specifically the character of the eschatological horizon which opens on the basis of this daemonism, what is of more interest to us is a further exploration of the importance of Nietzsche here. Nietzsche appears an interlocutor in the early stages as *point of departure* of Rosenzweig’s work, one which along with paganism is to be overcome; and yet he appears also in the *final* stages of Rosenzweig’s work as one of the principal representatives of Rosenzweig’s eschatological vision. This recurrence appears somewhat curious to us. We are also intrigued by this notion of the task of Redemption arising from such a daemonic vision as that of forging the ‘ring of life’. Gordon has insightfully compared this vision with the Heideggerian idea of authenticity.<sup>79</sup> Life becomes a model for eternity for Rosenzweig when it defines itself entirely in terms of itself rather than according to standards external to it, such as is the case for Dasein’s authentic understanding of itself, in which it must free itself from the inauthentic understanding imposed externally by all other individuals as a mass. We wonder, however, whether the forging of the ‘ring of life’

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<sup>79</sup> Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p220

of the soul could not be most fruitfully related to the metaphor of the ‘self-propelling’ or self-turning wheel of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* which Nietzsche exhorts all individuals to become.<sup>80</sup> This is the individual who, after the smashing of all law tablets is charged by Nietzsche to become his own centre of fecundity and law-giving, who is charged with the task of making himself the centre of gravity around which his world revolves, to ‘compel the stars to revolve’ around himself.<sup>81</sup> Rosenzweig’s vision of the individual as one who in following his own personal fate should be ‘prepared to lose himself in the current of the outside, to expand his narrow existence here into eternity’ would appear to correspond closely here to the Nietzschean vision of man’s task as that of becoming ones own centre of gravity for ones own universe. We noted, however, that Nietzsche’s critique of ‘Love of Neighbour’, a love to be replaced for Nietzsche with the love of the ‘most distant One’, is what causes him to fall short in Rosenzweig’s eyes. Yet such a love for the most distant also jars with Nietzsche’s own imperative of transforming the arbitrary and accidental character of whatever presents itself to us or ‘life’ into its own unique form of necessity, an imperative to which Rosenzweig’s ‘love of Neighbour’ for its part, as the integrating into a configuration of one’s fate of whatever the soul in its life’s journey happens upon, closely corresponds.

The recurrence of Nietzsche as representative of the ‘paganism’ which was supposed to be overcome in the passage from Creation to Redemption, could of course be understood as the recurrence of that sublimated and thus in reconciled form. The *Weltanschauungen* are ‘submerged before the one constant sight.’ (SR412, SE480) The arbitrariness of the limited subjective viewpoint is, in other words, overcome in the recognition that the limited or delimited character of this viewpoint was bestowed in Revelation by God. The *Weltanschauungen* of the ‘new philosophers’ can be donated a view beyond themselves in the ‘firm configuration’ which opens with the horizon of Redemption. This is precisely the configuration of the Star, composed of two principal elements: Judaism and Christianity, its central ‘fire’ and cast out ‘rays’ respectively. Both integrate and supersede the limitations of paganism and the *Weltanschauung* philosopher in their own way. The Johannine prayer of the pagan ‘non-believer’, even insofar as exemplified by Goethe, is ultimately insufficient in itself, argues Rosenzweig. Wholly lost in the moment of the fate bestowed upon it, it has no view or preview of the eternity which precisely he is trying to cultivate of and through this moment. Left to his own devices, this ‘non-believer’ could not envisage the entelechy of the moment towards this eternity, towards Redemption. For this structures are required which

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<sup>80</sup> Nietzsche, F p55 *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for Everyone and No-one* (London, Penguin Classics, 1961)

<sup>81</sup> *ibid* p88

already give access, indeed already embody eternity within time: ‘eternity must be accelerated, it must be capable of coming today.’ (SR288, SE364) On the one hand, Christianity achieves this in the fashion in which it renders all history as the mid-point between Christ’s coming and second coming, thus absorbing all history into the ‘eternal way’ towards Christ’s return and Redemption. As such, the *Weltanschauung* philosopher can peg his personal fate within time to this ‘eternal way’, becoming the structural mid-point between Revelation and Redemption. On the other hand, Judaism grants this eternity in the fashion in which its people stand at a remove from history, in the eternity of its people, immutability of its law and language, enclosed in the infinitely renewable cycle of its ritual calendar.

With regards to Christianity, one could ask how eternal such a way becomes once the culmination of this way is precisely envisaged as the Johannine Church of ‘life’ with its pagan ‘sons of the earth’: these ‘pagans’ are the culmination, that is, of the ‘eternal’ way into which they are to be integrated. Once more, however, this would be a question to pose to Rosenzweig concerning principally his relation to Goethe. More interesting here is the question of Judaism, and what this tells us about Rosenzweig’s relation to Nietzsche. In the first place, it is for Rosenzweig the cyclical aspect of the life of the Jewish community which makes it the way of access par excellence to eternity: ‘the cycles of the cultic prayer are repeated every day, every week, every year and in this repetition . . . it prepares time to accept eternity.’ (SR292, SE369) Jewish ritual life constitutes a self-propelling cycle, ever driven by its anticipation of Redemption. As such, the Jewish community does not simply orientate itself par excellence towards Redemption but is the very *embodiment* of eternity via the enactment of its calendar: ‘A single form of life wedding custom and law into one fills the moment and renders it eternal. But because of this, the moment is lifted out of the flux of time; and life, sanctified, no longer has the quality of temporal life.’ (SR303, SE386) The cyclical repetition of the Jewish calendar, in the self-enclosed character of its temporal form and its never ending capacity for renewal, is the prime model of eternity *as it already exists*. Secondly, and following from this first aspect, it is a model of the eternal not simply because of its temporal durability, which undoubtedly it may also possess, but rather because it defines itself entirely in its own terms: it is self-sufficient and self-renewing, whatever the caprices of the history and of the culture of the foreign lands in which the Jewish community merely sojourns: ‘our life is no longer meshed with anything outside of ourselves. We have struck root in ourselves . . . And it is this rooting in ourselves, and in nothing but ourselves, that vouchsafes eternity.’ (SR305, SE383)

We have already seen, however, that the model of the individual soul as that which is charged with the task of Redemption on both accounts functions according to the same logic. We observed that the soul achieves configuration through the forging for itself of the ‘the ring of life’. It makes of it, that is, its own self-referential embodiment of eternity, in which the ‘soul renews itself in itself’. The synagogue, that is, is effectively the *collectivisation* of this model of subjectivity in its eternally recurring cycle. Rather than supersede, or as its very method of supersession, the Jewish community is a collectivization of the daemon as it ‘forges the ring’ of life for itself. What goes for the individual subject goes also for the collective subject of the synagogue. As the Nietzschean subject is to become its own ‘self-turning wheel’ so is the Jewish community. Rosenzweig’s vision of the synagogue as the privileged cipher for Redemption, that is, ultimately draws him *closer* to rather than further from Nietzsche. It could of course be countered that a collectivization of the daemonic represents precisely a radical transformation of this concept. The Leibnizian reconfiguring of Aristotelian entelechy within the closed figure of the ‘windowless’ monad underlying the appropriation of daemonism at the hand of Hamman, Herder and Goethe should not be forgotten, a reconfiguration in which the reciprocal influencing of monads can be envisaged only speculatively via the postulating of a pre-established divine harmony behind causal-mechanistic interaction. On the other hand, it is just such a speculative gesture which Rose suspects is behind Rosenzweig’s appeal to the idealized figure of the Jewish community and to the anticipated reconciliation of Man and World in Redemption which it is to embody, a gesture which in its speculative sweep covers over the disjuncture between the realm of the private, autonomous subject and objective, substantive law which rends his work.<sup>82</sup>

Bensussan recognises the importance of engaging with Nietzsche over the question of messianism precisely insofar, however, as he represents its greatest *rival* in the history of philosophy: ‘in the field of the history of philosophy, such as the messianic question reconfigures of it certain axes, Nietzsche appears as a competitor of the messianic paradigm which he confronts on his own terms with an unequalled intensity.’<sup>83</sup> At question here is of course Nietzsche’s articulation of the concept of Eternal Recurrence, in which a purely cyclical model of time is held up against any other, including and indeed especially the messianic model, as a tonic against all false hope which would drain the world as it exists as such of all meaning. Any notion of Redemption would be by definition anathema to such a position. As well as a negation of the world in view of its Redemption, it would suggest a

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<sup>82</sup> Rose *Judaism and modernity: philosophical essays* (Oxford; Blackwell, 1993) p124

<sup>83</sup> Bensussan, *Temps Messianique* p136

weakness of spirit of those who wait impotently for it. Redemption of any kind takes place in Nietzsche insofar as Man would abandon the notion that the world requires Redemption; Redemption would represent the development of strength of spirit within Man which would allow for a simple affirmation of the world as it exists and in all its immanence.

Nonetheless, Bensussan adds, Nietzsche in his very opposition to messianism in fact comes closer to a messianic vision in its rudiments than the, in his eyes, inauthentic Hegelian branch of messianism. There are several areas, he argues, in which a rapprochement between the messianic model offered by the likes of Rosenzweig and Nietzsche is possible. He points towards the frequent usage of prophetic vocabulary in Nietzsche's work.<sup>84</sup> He also points out that in no way does the doctrine of eternal recurrence involve the passive acceptance of eternal repetition, rather the *imperative* to actively affirm each instant as an instant worthy of eternity.<sup>85</sup> We should, according to Bensussan, ultimately understand the doctrine of eternal recurrence:

as an economic figure authorising the leap into eternity, a thought of the relation of time and eternity. It should be noted that the extra-historicity bears in the thought of Rosenzweig a closely comparable function: it indicates the possibility of an anticipation of eternity always already lived and lived in (*toujours-déjà vécue et habitée*).<sup>86</sup>

Despite the fact that Nietzsche represents the antithesis of messianic thought, a certain 'correlation' one might say is possible between Nietzsche and Rosenzweig. Both ultimately envisage a leap from time into eternity, Bensussan argues, in function of which the *imperative* in the work of both is structured similarly. This is the imperative namely to affirm each moment in anticipation of eternity as a moment worthy of eternity. 'Every moment must be prepared to assume the fullness of eternity', writes Rosenzweig. 'Every moment can be the last.' (SR226, SE288) This exhortation is indeed perhaps the best summary of the imperative of 'Love of Neighbour' in Rosenzweig.

Bensussan's reasoning here is that given this correlation between Nietzsche and Rosenzweig, the shortcoming of Nietzsche's model of time and his rejection of the messianic horizon are capable of being redeemed. As such, however, Bensussan's terms can easily be reversed: the question we would pose, that is, is not how a rapprochement between Nietzsche and Rosenzweig is possible, but rather how Rosenzweig's vision of Redemption can be

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid p137

<sup>85</sup> Ibid p142

<sup>86</sup> Ibid p145

separated from the ‘pagan’ vision offered by Nietzsche. It should be recalled here that Nietzsche did not himself see his work simply as the antithesis of messianic thought. The appropriation of prophetic discourse of which Bensussan speaks in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* is in fact part of a conscious strategy outlined in its essentials in the preceding work the *Gay Science*. The *Gay Science*, Nietzsche tells us in the introduction to this book, is really nothing but ‘an amusement after long privation and powerlessness, the jubilation of returning strength, of a reawakened faith in tomorrow . . . How many and what sorts of things did not lie behind me then! This stretch of desert, exhaustion, loss of faith.’ The *Gay Science* is intended as a celebration, that is, after the recovery from nihilism: or more precisely from Christianity at the root of nihilism, insofar as it is Christianity which drained the present world of all meaning in favour of a fictional transcendence. The *Gay Science* is an expression of recovery from Christianity/nihilism insofar as the expression of the restoring of meaning to this world entirely without reference to a transcendent realm. What is significant here is the means through which this is expressed. Nietzsche continues: ‘Alas it is not only the poets and their beautiful ‘lyrical sentiments’ on whom this resurrected author has to vent his malice: who knows what kind of victim he is looking for . . . *Incipit tragoedia* we read at the end of this suspiciously innocent book. Beware! Something utterly wicked and mischievous is being announced here: *incipit parodia*, no doubt’.<sup>87</sup> ‘The parody begins’: this is a reference to the book which is to follow, precisely that of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* characterised in its style as a parody of the New Testament. Nietzsche is here announcing the coming of Zarathustra intended as the pseudo-messiah, as the *parody* of messianic hope, a notion he later reiterates in his unpublished fragments.<sup>88</sup> Nietzsche expresses the escape from the nihilism of Christianity, at the heart of which is its messianism, in terms of the parody of messianism, as an *appropriation* and *subversion* of its vocabulary the character of which Crepon has outlined in some detail.<sup>89</sup> Besides the ‘apostates’, who for Nietzsche return to religion out of weakness of spirit, there are those who turn to religion from an ‘abundance’ of spirit, who return to religion because they need something ‘hard to dance on’.<sup>90</sup>

Our question therefore is not how Nietzsche can be *reconciled* with messianic thought but to what extent Rosenzweig in making use of Nietzsche for the construction of his notion of

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<sup>87</sup> Nietzsche *The Gay Science: with a prelude in German rhymes and an appendix of songs* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) p4

<sup>88</sup> Namely in *Will to Power* Book IV (<http://www.scribd.com> - The-Will-to-Power-Web-Library) p84 ‘Zarathustra adopts a parodistic attitude toward all former values as a consequence of his abundance’: this parodistic attitude is thus opposed to the apostates who return to religion out of weakness.

<sup>89</sup> Crepon *Les Promesses du Langage: Benjamin, Rosenzweig, Heidegger* (Paris, Vrin, 2001) p23/4

<sup>90</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* p198

messianism is able to *distinguish* it from Nietzsche's 'parody' of messianism. Rosenzweig distances himself from the 'paganism' of Goethe and Nietzsche insofar as Man can only bring substantiality, eternity, to the world in *anticipatory* fashion of the one configuration and substance which God will bring about. Over and above Redemption as the work of Man in the form of 'Love of Neighbour' Redemption is required as rather an 'absolute act' of God: 'God himself must speak the ultimate word which may no longer be a word'.<sup>91</sup> To the prayer of the non-believer Rosenzweig adds messianic anticipation: 'this prayer renders a piece of life ripe for eternity'. It does not already make it eternal itself; it only makes it alive.' (SR286, SE360) The individual cultivates the Kingdom of God in the world, brings Redemption closer, by making an *already existing* piece of life 'ripe for eternity'. The individual in his 'forging of the ring of life' makes this individual and arbitrary 'piece of life' *worthy* of having eternity bestowed upon it. Eternity is not, however, *yet* bestowed upon it. As opposed to eternal recurrence, Rosenzweig presents us with another model. In creating the world and time, Rosenzweig speculates, God puts Himself into self-contradiction. God overcomes this self-contradiction, Rosenzweig speculates further, eternally *over* time. (GMW52) This notion of time shadows that of eternal recurrence whilst never fully corresponding to it. It shadows it because the transience of passing time is not an illusion as it is in Nietzsche. Following Rosenzweig's model, transience and its overcoming become one: in other words, the 'eternal overcoming of time' eternity and the transient moment become one.

The sole difference between Nietzsche's 'parody of messianism' and Rosenzweig's 'Love of Neighbour' lies, in other words, in the fact that what for Nietzsche constitutes already an inescapable fate becomes for Rosenzweig the object of hope and anticipation. For Nietzsche the moment is already the eternal: that which has already recurred infinitely and will likewise do so infinitely in the future in Eternal Recurrence. This represents precisely what Bensussan calls the shortcoming of Nietzsche insofar as through this doctrine Nietzsche makes of time a fixed order. Against this, he argues, there is Rosenzweig's model of each 'Today' as a constant renewal and recreation which suspends all order, which 'suspends all judgement which would like to see itself as without appeal, all action which would give itself as irreversible.'<sup>92</sup> We should remember, however, that for Rosenzweig this very momentary quality, the transience of time, is the quality of Creation, whilst Redemption has the task precisely of redeeming it of this momentariness, of its 'phenomenality'. For Rosenzweig, the disorder of time is to become the order of eternity. What is this order precisely? We have

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid p238

<sup>92</sup>Bensussan, Temps Messianique p130

already seen its embodiments or microcosms within time: the ‘ring of life’ which the individual forges, or collectively the ever-renewed cyclical Jewish calendar. For Nietzsche, however, convinced of the scientific viability of his doctrine given the finite character of physical mass, transience is and has always already been absorbed into the eternal cycle. The arbitrary has always already become the necessary. The principle difference between Rosenzweig and Nietzsche is that for the former this remains to be achieved. The perhaps more significant similarity, however, is that this is *all* that Redemption is to achieve. There is no indication in Rosenzweig that Redemption is to redeem the present moment of anything other than time and arbitrariness. There is nothing which corresponds in the *Star of Redemption* to the Benjaminian dynamic between remembrance and prolepsis on the basis of which Bensussan constructs his messianic model of time, a temporality driven by the exigency of the redemption of injustice in history. There is in fact no mention at all of any redemption of injustice in Rosenzweig.<sup>93</sup>

It is not simply, therefore, that messianism or ‘Judaism’ in Rosenzweig is brought into correlation with the ‘new philosophy’ of which Nietzsche is representative: Judaism’s very ethical *imperative* is modified, *displaced*, according to this philosophy. Behind the ‘Love of Neighbour’ that is, is once more Nietzsche’s imperative towards the formation of one’s own unique form of necessity, one’s own unique *Weltanschauung*. Bensussan writes of the ‘as if’ structure which determines in parallel fashion the work of both Nietzsche and Rosenzweig. For Nietzsche the imperative takes the form ‘to act as if each of my acts of necessity repeated itself identically an infinite amount of times’. Act in other words as if each moment was its own eternity. For Rosenzweig, this becomes rather ‘to act at each instant as if it was the instant of the coming’.<sup>94</sup> Rosenzweig’s own formulation of this, however, reduces the difference to nothing: ‘every moment must be prepared to assume the fullness of eternity. Accordingly the Ultimate is that which is expected with every next moment’<sup>95</sup> In effect one

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<sup>93</sup> Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p201 ‘what is perhaps most striking about the *Star* is how rarely it touches upon such moral themes.’ Anckaert argues, we noted, that Rosenzweig cannot fully take account of the immediacy and ethical exigency of the appeal other and thus to an extent neutralises the risk of evil. Also Srajek *In the Margins of Deconstruction: Jewish Conceptions of Ethics in Emmanuel Levinas and Jacques Derrida* (Pennsylvania, Duquesne University Press, 1998) p77 argues that Rosenzweig’s correlation between finite and infinite is more a question of truth than of ethics, contrasting the *unendliche Aufgabe* of Cohen’s correlation and the *ewiger Anteil* of Rosenzweig’s correlation. Anderson ‘Revelation and Renewal: History, Human Progress and the Messianic Idea in Cohen and Rosenzweig’ in *On the Outlook: Figures of the Messianic* ed. by Crombez, T, Vloeberghs, K (Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007) pp45-57 (p53) likewise contrasts Cohen and Rosenzweig, noting that where for the former Judaism and the individual Jew were to offer themselves to ‘general culture’ as part of their ethical mission, Rosenzweig ‘does not often mention the world at large or the notion of potential responsibility for the other’

<sup>94</sup> Bensussan, *Temps Messianique* p145

<sup>95</sup> Ibid



does not anticipate Redemption beyond and through the transient moment but rather one anticipates Redemption as the eternal character of this moment. One of the principal signs betraying the displacement of the imperative of 'Judaism' effected by the Nietzschean *Weltanschauung* point of departure is the fashion in which Redemption in Rosenzweig wavers between something *anticipated* and that which in some sense must *already* exist. True, there is for Rosenzweig a 'not yet inscribed over all redemptive unison.' However: 'this anticipation, this Today, this eternity of thanksgiving for God's love – an eternity as we explained, not "very long", but "even today" (Nicht "sehr lange", sondern "heute schon"). (SR234, SE298) 'Even today' Hallo translates; and yet it could just as easily read 'already today'. Implied is a rejection of the model of Redemption in which Redemption is the end or *telos* of history, in which the moments which lead up to this end are the mere means to this end and have no special value in themselves. Each moment becomes a moment of suspense before Redemption, is in a sense suspended before the ever possible arrival of Redemption. Beyond this, however, a certain 'paradox' is at work, as Altmann points out. The eternity of the Kingdom implies both the future as 'eternally on its way' *and* the 'eternalizing of the moment'. In other words, Redemption has *already* arrived: 'in a sense, the eschaton is in the present, and eschatology points to the future only insofar as it is realized in the present'<sup>96</sup> For Rosenzweig, the present is already redeemed - at least, in our engagement with the world, one must act as such.

Messianism in Rosenzweig is not symptomatic, that is, of an imperative re-orientating the Nietzschean *Weltanschauung* position of the 'new philosopher'; it is rather re-orientated, restructured according to this position, according to the imperative which this position embodies. 'Man', explains Rosenzweig 'is an impartible part of the multipartite world. The world grows throughout its ages. It has its own fate. Man's fate is part of this fate. But it is not absorbed by it, nor dissolved in it. Though it is a part, it is impartible. Man is the microcosm . . . man's fate therefore resembles a particular moment in the current of time' (SR276) The fate which man creates for himself, his 'ring of life' is not yet fully eternity because the overall fate of the world is not yet available. Without this perspective, the 'ring of life' which each individual creates cannot yet be recognised for the eternity which it *already* is as a microcosm of this fate. Our 'today' is a microcosm of the 'Victorious Today' of God which is in fact the ensemble of all such 'todays' lost to time into one configuration. The 'victorious Today' of God forms the necessary horizon against which each individual cultivates the form

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<sup>96</sup> Altmann p134 'Franz Rosenzweig on History' in Mendes-Flohr, P (ed) *The Philosophy of Franz Rosenzweig* (Hanover, University Press of New England 1988) pp 124-137

of his own soul. Without the belief, namely, in this horizon such work would be in vain. To the 'paganism' of Nietzsche must be added 'hope' and anticipation; yet what is the nature of this hope and anticipation? One 'hopes' and 'anticipates' that this fate resemble 'a moment in the ages of the world or, more explicitly perhaps, an hour. . . that time which man himself inserts into the sequence of heavenly signs'. Hope is not hope for the future, but hope for the present. The present is not directed towards the future; rather the future towards the present: 'impatience for Redemption', Rosenzweig argues, is necessary in order to make 'Today – eternal'. (SR228, SE290) The 'wish to bring about the Messiah before his time' is not a grasping for the future for Rosenzweig but an attempt to save the present moment from the transience of time. Anticipation of the redemption of the world is necessary as the belief that one's personal fate contains within it eternity, that one's present personal configuration of the soul will form an integral part of the 'world configuration' to be established with the completion of the work of Redemption by God. It is only in this belief that the daemon is able to complete itself as a self-enclosed form, or the Jewish calendar as a self-enclosed and self-renewing cycle. Eschatological anticipation takes on the functional role of *valorising* Nietzsche's very imperative: it provides the energy through which the individual, or the Jewish community can close the circle of their own fate.<sup>97</sup>

The 'ethical' imperative of the 'Love of Neighbour' 'imposed' upon philosophy by 'Judaism', or in some sense 'inspiring' philosophy, has been transformed from the inside. Could Rosenzweig's supplementing of Nietzsche with the eschatological perspective not in some sense be regarded as a fulfilment of Nietzsche's somewhat preliminary and sketchy notion of the 'parody' of messianism? Alternatively, could both Scholem's appraisal of Rosenzweig's vision as representative of 'a very old and very powerful movement in Judaism', one we shall observe in more detail in our consideration of Levinas, and Gordon's presentation of this same vision as representative of a more Nietzschean/Heideggerian inflexion be compatible? Is messianism by definition its own parody? Complicated in any case is the notion of a 'turn' in postmodern thought: parody is perhaps inscribed in it from the start. We could add here that, contrary to Rosenzweig, Nietzsche does in some sense already have a view towards objectivity beyond the *Weltanschauung* of the individual: 'the world is

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<sup>97</sup>Caygill, *Speech Thinking* p150/1 Interesting in this context is the commentary of Caygill on Rosenzweig's 'New Thinking'. Under Rosenzweig, the Nietzschean *Weltanschauung* philosopher is in danger of becoming a prophet, as indeed he had done for Nietzsche. Under such circumstances, argues Caygill, Rosenzweig falls vulnerable to the critique of 'absolute inwardness' in which interiority is recast simply as such into the site of revelation. He admittedly argues that Rosenzweig avoids this pitfall because of his focus on the collective aspect of religious life. Once seen in a less protestant and more 'pagan' light, however, this collective aspect can also be integrated into this Nietzschean closed circle.

deep' writes Nietzsche in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 'deeper than ever the day has thought'.<sup>98</sup> This vision of the depth of the world, its infinite vitality or secret fecundity is for Nietzsche already the means through which nihilism can be overcome, in imitation or mimesis of which one can become one's own self-creating, self-turning wheel. In making use of the Judaeo-Christian narrative of Creation, Revelation and Redemption, Rosenzweig further consolidates this vision insofar as rendering with greater precision the qualities or attributes wherein this 'vitality' can be identified. In breaking down this vitality into its modalities, Rosenzweig structures what in Nietzsche is limited to the vagaries of poetic exhortation. It is in this light that the rapprochement effectuated by Gordon between the *Star of Redemption* and Dilthey's early Hegel inspired pantheism could be understood, as well as Rosenzweig's subtle modulation on the pantheism of the Spinozian variety observed by Rubinstein.<sup>99</sup> Against this notion of Rosenzweig in his envisioning of the task of 'Love of Neighbour' as consolidating Nietzsche's 'parody' of messianism, it could of course be argued that the appeal to Redemption as the 'absolute act' of God entirely exceeds the Nietzschean paradigm. In response to this we could note already the sense in which the notion of Redemption as 'event' is likewise modified. We can already see this in the notion of Redemption as the 'victorious Today' of God, which is not so much an *event* in itself but rather the *perspective* upon an event: *the event* or *Ereignis* is that of the World. This is perhaps the final and ultimate displacement of the eschatological dimension, one which exceeds the boundaries of this work: Redemption is transformed from an event into a theosophical *perspective*, a perspective as once more a structure of the single event of the 'vitality' of the World.<sup>100</sup>

### Levinas: Messianism, Functionality, Displacement

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<sup>98</sup> Nietzsche, *Zarathustra* p144

<sup>99</sup> Gordon, Rosenzweig and Heidegger p90, Rubinstein, E *An Episode of Jewish Romanticism: Franz Rosenzweig and the Star of Redemption* (Albany, N.Y, State University of New York Press, 1999) p84

<sup>100</sup> We regretfully cannot explore this aspect within the limits of this work, insofar as it requires an engagement with another current of thought, that of historicism. According to Myers *Resisting History: Historicism and its Discontents in German Jewish Thought* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2003) for example, *The Star of Redemption* can also be seen more generally as a response to the 'crisis of historicism'. Myers ultimately argues that in his reaction against the historicist school, Rosenzweig nonetheless in many respects betrays its influence. The same in fact could be said for Benjamin. What we believe can be convincingly argued that the only means through which Rosenzweig is able to distinguish himself from the historicist *Weltanschauung* is via the theosophical perspective the uncomfortable existence of which commentators often ignore. The distinction between history as the historicist 'piling of wreckage' and history as the growth of Redemption' can only be made from the perspective of God: 'For God, redemption provides this assurance of eternity despite the temporality of self-revelation . . . for God, his world-day becomes, without more ado, his own day. But this direct equivalence of assurance and fulfilment of eternity is not valid for the other "elements"; it is this, indeed, which makes them the "others" and God the One.'

Despite the various parallels made between Rosenzweig and Levinas, misgivings or observations of the kind offered by Scholem and Mendes-Flohr on the question of messianism are rarely expressed in Levinasian scholarship. Given these correlations and the obvious influence of Rosenzweig on Levinas, however, such a form of critique is eminently possible. Levinas has been criticised on more than one occasion for what could be called the displacement of philosophy by Judaism. Janicaud is the principal representative of such a critique.<sup>101</sup> He writes of the seizure, the taking hostage, of phenomenology by theology in Levinas in which the former is replaced by a dogmatic metaphysics of revelation and transcendence. By virtue of Levinas' 'theological turn', it is argued, that which renders phenomenology as phenomenology – its strict methodology and restriction to the immanence of what appears – is renounced. For Janicaud phenomenology in Levinas is stripped of its rigour and reduced to the status of 'mere inspiration' behind a series of dogmatic utterances.<sup>102</sup> What is rarely attempted, however, is the reverse position.

Taking the lead from the likes of Scholem, Mendes-Flohr and Gordon we have developed in greater detail the paradigm of a certain displacement not to say parody of messianism at work in Rosenzweig. This was against the general consensus over the relation between philosophy and messianism in Rosenzweig, in which the former is orientated towards and ordered according to the imperative of the latter. A similar consensus reigns in Levinas scholarship. There are, however, dissenting voices. For Batnizsky, Levinas is 'not at all a simple affiliate of Hebrew'. He is rather the 'defender of a particularly modern philosophical project.'<sup>103</sup> Levinas does not represent a religious turn to philosophy but rather a philosophical turn to religion.<sup>104</sup> Batnizsky indeed writes more generally; 'much of the contemporary philosophical discussion of "religion" especially in the continental philosophical circles, is less about the meaning of "religion" than about the meaning and scope of philosophical inquiry in the modern world.'<sup>105</sup> In general, Batnizsky sees Levinas' appeal to Judaism as the means for justifying a continuing social and political role for philosophy, as an attempt to preserve its role as purveyor of a universal morality.<sup>106</sup> In order to realise this project, Levinas does not appeal to an outside source, neither Judaism nor any other positive religion; he

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<sup>102</sup> Janicaud, D *Phenomenology and the "theological turn": the French debate* (New York; Fordham University Press, 2000)

<sup>103</sup> Batnizky, L *Leo Strauss and Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophy and the Politics of Revelation* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2006) p4

<sup>104</sup> Ibid p22-4

<sup>105</sup> Ibid xx

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

attempts rather to articulate revelation entirely within philosophy. Underlying Batnizsky's position is the thesis that revelation and morality can never be articulated merely philosophically and without appeal to any specific positive religion. Levinas' attempt to articulate morality and revelation thus inevitably results in their distortion.<sup>107</sup>

One of the functions of Levinas' combination of philosophy and religion, Batnizsky argues, is that of preserving or indeed restoring a certain Cartesian notion of subjectivity in the face of its postmodern discreditors. Despite misgivings about any notion of subjectivity in Levinas as Cartesian, this indeed would seem to be a sound starting point for a consideration of the function of messianism in Levinas.<sup>108</sup> The function of messianism in Rosenzweig was to redeem the Nietzschean subject of its perspectivism, it appears that Levinas' notion of messianism locates itself slightly later in the history of subjectivity. Alternatively, what is at stake in Levinas is a certain vision of humanism from which a certain concept of subjectivity arises. Levinas' major period of intellectual production locates itself in the period of greatest influence of structuralism: the rise to prominence of the human sciences methodology in philosophy, with their apparent reduction of relations between human beings to the structures – sociological, psychological, linguistic etc. - which animate and render them intelligible. Structuralism is perceived by Levinas as a symptom of a wider crisis in humanism. The question thus arises whether philosophy in Levinas is ordered according to the imperative for which Judaism stands as cipher, or whether it and Judaism are ordered by the exigency of saving what Levinas himself describes as an 'outmoded' (*perimé*) humanistic vocabulary after the 'end of humanism' (HAH112) The question arises, that is, to what extent messianism disrupts the functioning of philosophy, and to what extent messianism serves a function within it. Besides the question of any correlation, therefore, there is also the question of the displacement, the parody, which the eschatological dimension undergoes in Levinas' work in relation to such a vocabulary and in function of such motivation.

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid p44/5 namely insofar as 'Levinas very much aligns himself with an intellectualist tradition of religious thought that would posit the primacy of moral reason, over God's will.' In conflating the dimension of knowledge and faith à la Descartes, namely, Levinas cannot take into account the independence and gratuity in the manner in which God enters into relation with Man through revelation.

<sup>108</sup> In the essay the 'Philosophy of Hitlerism' Levinas articulates a concept of subjectivity which is precisely to overcome the limitations of the Cartesian model, in which autonomy is not to reside in formalistic repose above the material fact of its existence, but is to be regarded rather as a material event to be accomplished at each moment.

### Conclusion

The articulation of messianism by Rosenzweig within the horizon of the Nietzschean *Weltanschauung* represents more a form of displacement of Judaism by philosophy than correlation between Judaism and Philosophy. This model of ‘correlation’ or ‘inspiration’ involves philosophy being passively orientated towards the inescapable imperative imposed upon it by its other of which Judaism represents the privileged cipher. We noted, however, that the rapprochement effectuated by Rosenzweig between the two is justified insofar as Judaism is called on to serve a particular function within the philosophical framework. Namely it helps to render intelligible the elusive relation to objectivity within the *Weltanschauung* philosophy. We might say that it is philosophy which is ultimately the active partner here; Judaism is restructured according to that for which it serves as function. It is orientated by the imperative of philosophy, its own imperative being transformed from within into a reflection of the former. Judaism, we noted, attains its very status as a privileged cipher for Redemption in Rosenzweig via a certain Nietzschean dynamic. That which at the start of the text is envisaged as the means of exceeding the narrow self-enclosure of the Nietzschean subject ultimately functions according to the imperative of this subject, as that which guarantees for it the means of closing the circle of its own fate, be it on an individual or collective level. We speculated indeed that it is possible that the supplementing of Nietzsche with a certain messianism is indeed perhaps a profoundly Nietzschean gesture, part of what for Nietzsche goes by the name of the ‘parody’ of messianism. We suggested certain possibilities for the application of this thesis of the displacement or parody of messianism to Levinas, and we will now explore these in greater detail.

## CHAPTER2) LEVINAS, MESSIANISM AND HUMANISM

### Introduction

In the first chapter, we outlined what could be called the displacement or parody thesis at work in Rosenzweig's construction of the eschatological dimension; this was set against what we called the more commonly accepted correlation thesis. In addition, the possibility that this latter could be transferred to a consideration of messianism in Levinas was indicated. One of the principal factors which will distinguish our account of messianism in Levinas from that of Rosenzweig is our dynamic treatment of the former. To engage with the concept of messianism in Levinas is to observe its evolution throughout his oeuvre. In this chapter, we will present the general direction of this evolution, giving an overview of Levinas' work, before examining each step in more detail in subsequent chapters. We will here present the general theses of this work, framed as an attempt to revisit certain established consensuses over the status of messianism in Levinas' work. The first of these theses concerns the dynamic character of messianism in Levinas often neglected in the secondary literature, along with a consideration of the direction in which messianism in Levinas in its dynamism tends. Our second thesis concerns a qualification of the correlation model in the understanding of messianism in Levinas. We aim to question less radically as in the case of Rosenzweig the notion of a correlation. We are more concerned with looking into the circumstances under which such a correlation takes place. Messianism can be understood as a 'correlation' between philosophy and Judaism only in a very particular sense and this 'correlation', we will argue, is only of secondary importance to the understanding of messianism in Levinas. The character of messianism in Levinas is structured according to other more fundamental exigencies, and what is of primary importance to an understanding of messianism in Levinas is an understanding of how it is re-ordered, displaced by these exigencies for which it serves as function.

### Messianism: Literature Review

Messianism in Levinas, as we have already noted, has not by and large been the subject of sustained consideration amongst commentators. Nonetheless there has been a sufficient volume of articles on messianism and summary treatments of messianism within monographs

on Levinas to establish a consensus as to the character, role and significance of messianism in Levinas' work. There are two principal aspects to this consensus.

The first aspect of this consensus concerns the prevailing tendency towards holism in the treatment of messianism in Levinas. There is namely a consensus amongst commentators that a single, coherent and consistent form of messianism is at work throughout Levinas' oeuvre. Kavka summarizes most concisely this single messianic paradigm in Levinas. Messianic anticipation in Levinas, argues Kavka, 'has a double edged quality in which the Messiah I await is not external to myself'.<sup>109</sup> There is for Kavka a structural ambiguity in the notion of messianism which he believes can be traced back to the rabbinic tradition and which according to him Levinas' work faithfully reflects. This is the ambiguity between the essentially passive expectation of the Messianic age whose coming is beyond the power of any human to induce, and messianism conceived as an ethical paradigm implying the responsibility of each individual to actively assume the role of the Messiah and to work towards the bringing about of the messianic age. In the latter case the figure of the Messiah 'is synonymous with', or one might say becomes a cipher for, 'human moral perfection'.<sup>110</sup> Plüss formulates a very similar notion of the structural ambiguity of messianism in Levinas' work: 'On some occasions, it is with the other; on others, it is with the 'I' that the Messiah is compared.' Plüss in turn expresses in similar fashion to Kavka the manner in which messianism in Levinas tends towards becoming a cipher for the moral task of each individual: 'For Levinas subjectivity bears alone the weight of her duty, her task. This is no mean feat but is rather to take upon itself the weight of the world, the weight of her suffering and her redemption.'<sup>111</sup> Levinas' messianism, that is, is attached to a particular model of humanism. Subjectivity comes into its own, becomes 'authentic' if you like, only once it has assumed the messianic task of redeeming the world. Alternatively, as Chalier expresses it, coming close to the messianic formula proposed by Bensussan in the last chapter, messianism is not principally or at least uniquely an exterior but rather or also an 'interior event'. It is the 'interior event' of the inversion of the self-interested attitude of the ego, the inversion of the 'for-itself' of the ego into the 'for the other'.<sup>112</sup> The messianic vision which Levinas presents is essentially humanistic, a messianism of the responsible self, or alternatively Levinas' humanism is essentially messianic: the 'interior' life of the individual is pegged to the horizon of redemption, structurally orientated towards its anticipation and at the same time towards

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<sup>109</sup> Kavka, *Jewish Messianism* p7

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid* p8

<sup>111</sup> Plüss, *Das Messianische* p331

<sup>112</sup> Chalier, *C Lévinas: L'Utopie de l'humain* (Paris, Editions Albin Michel, 1993) p146



responsibility for its realization. For Chaliel indeed, not only can Levinas' diverse formulations of the messianic dimension be grouped around the notion of a messianic humanism or humanistic messianism, the spirit of Levinas' oeuvre as a whole can be summarized via the 'messianic task' which the self assumes: 'does not the excellence of the human first pierce the night of being when this task becomes the task of each individual? This is without doubt what Levinas believed, since the entirety of his oeuvre does not cease to philosophically deepen this first, great intuition.'<sup>113</sup>

This humanist construal entails a purging of a series of characteristics conventionally associated with messianism. Principal among these is the stripping from messianism of any notion of teleology. Messianism in Levinas is to take place on the existential level and not on the level of the philosophy of history. Messianism in Levinas does not function, that is, on the level of objective and overarching historical tendencies. Ajzenstat frames this best: Levinas, she argues, 'moves his reading of the Talmudic texts on messianism gradually but surely always towards its aontological, ahistorical culminating claim: that it is here already for those who choose it; that the messianic era or world is not a location in time or place; that it is already here for those who choose it; that messianism is ethical responsibility; that "the messiah is me".'<sup>114</sup> It is the self, each self, which takes on the burden of realizing the messianic age; in order for this self to fully accept this responsibility, any objective support in the form of a historical teleology which the self would merely key into in its already ineluctable progress must be abandoned. There is to be no certainty in Levinas that the messianic age will be achieved. There is indeed one sense in which it must not be achieved: the messianic task is an infinite task of which any notion of a closure to history in the form of the advent of the messianic kingdom would represent a betrayal.<sup>115</sup> To a post-holocaust form of messianism, furthermore, any notion of historical teleology, and the dimension of theodicy which it inevitability implies would be anathema.<sup>116</sup>

The second aspect to the consensus concerns that of which messianism in Levinas is to be the expression. In the last chapter, we outlined how messianism in Rosenzweig is conventionally regarded as an expression of a certain essential, or essentialized, correlation between 'Judaism' and 'Philosophy'. We noted there the position of some of its principal exponents, Gibbs and Cohen, on both Rosenzweig and Levinas. For Trigano, Levinas is first

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<sup>113</sup> Ibid p49

<sup>114</sup> Ajzenstat, *O Driven Back to the Text: the Premodern Sources of Levinas' Postmodernism* (Pittsburgh, Dunesque University Press, 2001) p251

<sup>115</sup> See for example ibid p261 and also Cariamelli 'Un temps achevé? Questions Critiques à propos du Messianique chez Lévinas' *Cahiers d'Etudes Lévinassiennes* 4 (2005) pp11-20

<sup>116</sup> Ajzenstat, *Driven Back to the Text* p308

and foremost a Jewish thinker who adopts phenomenology as a kind of rhetorical tool to garner the respect of a French audience.<sup>117</sup> Lessing in similar fashion frames Levinas according to the mode of a Jewish sage: 'I suggest, therefore, that Levinas does see himself as at least striving to be a *hakham*, that this has indeed influenced his reading and exposition of philosophy as well as of Jewish texts.'<sup>118</sup> The correlation between 'Judaism' and 'Philosophy' in Levinas' work has been the concern of a wide range of commentators. Here is Ciaramelli's appraisal, for example, of Levinas' translation of 'Hebrew', taken once more as essential or allegorical figure, into 'Greek':

Translating into Greek this non-Hellenism of the Jewish tradition and way of life (de la tradition et de l'existence juives) and, above all, this bearing witness (cette épreuve) to the non-belonging of the human to the order of being, signifies saying in the language of philosophy that which precisely exceeds it. But there is only the *logos* of philosophy to translate universally the extra-philosophical primacy of the ethical of which Judaism is the witness.'<sup>119</sup>

We find here as in the likes of Gibbs and Cohen the essential character of the appeal of 'Greek' to 'Hebrew' and 'Hebrew' to 'Greek' to which Levinas' work attests. Here the 'extra-philosophical primacy of the ethical' of which Judaism is 'witness' is tied to the critique of the metaphysics of nostalgia which Levinas sees as determining the course of philosophy. From the Parmenidean One to the Hegelian notion of Spirit and latterly to Heidegger's notion of Being, what is shared is an envisaging of particularity, separation and difference as in some sense an inferior or fallen state in face of a primordial unity. What 'Judaism' understands and lives, however, is the fact that these qualities are the very source of transcendence, from the transcendence which arises in the relation of one individual to another to the transcendence which arises in the relation with God.

The correlation between, or appeal to Judaism or the 'extra-philosophical' on the behalf of philosophy is on the whole not envisaged in the secondary literature as an abrogation of its philosophical status.<sup>120</sup> Bensussan, whom we cited in the context of the correlation thesis in Rosenzweig has more specifically this to say on Levinas: 'The merit and singularity of the thought of Emmanuel Levinas is without doubt in its awakening of philosophical attention to resonances and echoes coming from an exteriority unsuspected by philosophy, the Biblical-

<sup>117</sup> Trigano, S 'Levinas et le projet de la philosophie juive' in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et Judaïsme* ed. by Cohen-Levinas, D Trigano, S (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp145-178

<sup>118</sup> Lesser, A.H 'Levinas and the Jewish Ideal of the Sage' in *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* ed. by Hand, S (Surrey, Curzon Press, 1996) pp141-152 (p150)

<sup>119</sup> Ciaramelli, F *Transcendance et Ethique : Essai sur Levinas* (Paris, Edition Ousia, 1989) p40

<sup>120</sup> The exception here is of course Janicaud op cit

Talmudic exteriority.’<sup>121</sup> Despite this, despite the fact that ‘Athens will no longer be entirely, once its limits are blurred or rendered uncertain’, in Athens the position of Levinas remains within philosophy: ‘It works to announce *in Greek*. It refuses therefore all authority to Biblical verse or to the Talmudic folio.’<sup>122</sup> Not the authority, only the echo or the trace of the transcendence, and the ethical exigency which it embodies, is translated into philosophy. For Chaliel, as for Gibbs, indeed this translation is necessary for Judaism itself, as the means through which the Hebrew sources are freed from their theological and thus particularistic status. The Talmud already on its own account offers ‘echoes’ and ‘traces’ of that which cannot be reduced to a fixed set of theological ‘formulas’, namely the elusive trace, ever in risk of disappearing from sight, of a transcendence, transcendent to the point of being between presence and absence. In pursuing this trace, the Talmud already embodies its own particular form of rational discourse, namely the dialectics of the Talmud, already ripe for becoming a source for philosophical rationality.<sup>123</sup> In a parallel sense, Burggreave emphasizes the particular style of commentary which Levinas himself practices in his Talmudic commentaries. He points to the style of ‘intellectual’ and ‘inventive’, rather than ‘pious’ and ‘traditionalistic’ commentary inherited from the national, Lithuanian tradition of intellectual lay Judaism.<sup>124</sup>

Within this correlation model the bridgehead or point of encounter between philosophy and Judaism is more often than not considered to be messianism. For Plüss, the privilege of Judaism lies in its greater proximity to or more faithful expression of the same ‘pre-philosophical experience’ internal to both philosophy and Judaism: <sup>125</sup>

In certain places, Lévinas indicates the likely possibility that interpretation of the Bible belongs to the same "pre-philosophical" experiences which mark his own thinking. Marked, influenced, but not grounded in direct and fully realizable modes of approach. Judaism does not provide for Lévinas the foundational principle of his

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<sup>121</sup> Bensussan, G ‘Quand faire c’est dire : *Naase Venichma* dans l’oeuvre de Levinas’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: philosophie et judaïsme* ed. by Cohen-Levinas, D Trigano, S (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp37-56 (p37)

<sup>122</sup> Ibid p38

<sup>123</sup> Chaliel, C *La Trace de l’Infini: Emmanuel Levinas et la Source Hébraïque* (Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2002) p15/16

<sup>124</sup> Burggreave, R ‘The Bible Gives to Thought: Levinas on the Possibility and Proper Nature of Biblical Thinking’ in *The Face of the Other and the Trace of God* ed. by Bloechl, J (New York, Fordham University Press, 2000) pp165-183 (p158)

<sup>125</sup> See also Lévy, Z ‘L’hébreu et le grec comme métaphores de la pensée juive et de la philosophie dans la pensée d’E. Lévinas’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et Judaïsme* ed. by Trigano, S, Cohen-Levinas, D (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp109-121 (p115) or Wright, T *The Twilight of Jewish Philosophy: Emmanuel Levinas’ Ethical Hermeneutics* (Amsterdam, Harwood Academic Publishers, 1999) xiv for similar arguments

thinking. It lies not in the realm of the clarity and light of philosophy, but is rather 'pré-philosophique'.<sup>126</sup>

Philosophy is unable to articulate its own premises because it itself begins from a pre-philosophical 'experience', an experience to which Judaism has at least historically proved more attuned: 'The meaning, insofar as it is the meaning of beings and of Being, begins, Levinas tell us, elsewhere. This elsewhere lies once more in the Bible and in Judaism.' What is this 'elsewhere', this pre-philosophical experience, which is the foundation of all rationality and meaning? Judaism is not to be a body of thought; it is more primordially *cipher* for that which is not itself an 'other thought' but 'the other to thought'.<sup>127</sup> The 'other to thought' cannot be defined in substantive terms or according to fixed characteristics; it is rather that which *happens* to thought: 'Judaism, as I see it, is the event to which Levinas guides our thoughts.' 'Judaism' is fundamentally not a body of thought or a state but an 'event', what Plüss calls the *messianic* event, messianism as such, disturbing thought from any complacency or detachment or any ambition to universal comprehension. The advent of difference as the disturbance of consciousness both awakening philosophy and depriving it of any claims to all-powerful comprehension: 'Judaism happens (*ereignet sich*), futurally (*zukünftig*) and as unforeseeable. It befalls thought as it were. It constitutes the disturbance of thought, not its self-discovery.'<sup>128</sup> The 'event' of Judaism is the 'unforeseeable' and 'enigmatic' advent of particularity or difference which the other person represents. As disturbance of thought it is 'apocalyptic' and yet also contains within it a 'futural' character, an awakening of a certain desire. Both philosophy and Judaism are tuned in to the same pre-philosophical experience, or to the 'messianic' *Ereignis* structural to experience, and are brought into correlation by virtue of this fact. Thinking in parallel terms, Ward writes of the need to 'unmask the theological economy, the eschatology, which throbs as a groundbase through Levinas' subsequent works. This theological economy constitutes the other narrative, or more precisely the narrative of the other, which the philosophical narrative acts as a commentary upon.' Messianism is in Levinas 'the borderline dividing the philosophical from the theological, taking it as the far edge of the philosophical and the near edge of the theological. It is Levinas' messianic eschatology that makes his work of considerable interest for the theologian.'<sup>129</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Plüss, *Das Messiansiche* p22

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid* p27

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid* p103

<sup>129</sup> Ward, G 'On Time and Salvation: The Eschatology of Emmanuel Levinas' in *Facing the Other: The Ethics of Emmanuel Levinas* ed. by Hand, S (Surrey, Curzon Press, 1996) pp153-172 (p157)

We have here two principal theses: firstly, messianism as Levinas articulates it is determined principally if not exclusively by a humanism in which the messiah is to serve as model for the ethical task of the self; secondly, messianism is the principal expression, indeed the very means of articulating, of the ‘correlation’ between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Philosophy’. It is our belief, however, that this consensus does not fully capture either the character or the wider role or function of messianism in Levinas’ oeuvre. In what follows we shall explain why.

### Not Messianism but Messianisms

We shall start with the first thesis, the defining of messianism in terms of what Plüss calls the ‘messianic process of self-becoming’.<sup>130</sup> We do not of course wish to dispute the existence of this strand of messianism in Levinas’ work. What we dispute is that it should be framed as its exclusive or at least principle expression. There is heterogeneity to Levinas’ diverse articulations of the messianic dimension in his philosophical work, a heterogeneity which requires highlighting.

The first form of messianism is to be found in Levinas’ earlier philosophical work, corresponding to a messianism not of the self but of the other and in a quite specific sense. Reference to the messianic horizon as that which opens up via the other person, although absent from *On Escape*, where the need for an ‘escape’ from Being is expressed without yet any means towards it outlined, can be found in particular, namely *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents*. *Time and the Other*, for example, is concerned principally with the dimension of ‘salvation’ which opens in the face of the other. Salvation from what?: ‘everyday life, far from constituting a fall, and far from appearing as a betrayal with regard to our metaphysical destiny, emanates from our solitude and forms our solitude and forms the very accomplishment of solitude and the infinitely serious attempt to respond to its profound unhappiness.’(TO58) Solitude is represented as the fundamental state of subjectivity: the subject is a ‘monad’ ‘without windows or doors’, riveted or chained to its being. The other person is the *event* which happens *to* this monad, the event of alterity *as such*. The other signifies on the horizon of consciousness in a similar fashion to death for the Heidegger of *Being and Time*. The other signifies namely as the concrete embodiment of that which is radically beyond the dimension of possibility of the monad, as the very impossibility of any possibility for it. Levinas shifts the emphasis from this impossibility as finitude of the self to

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<sup>130</sup> Plüss, *Das Messianische* p197

an indication of the radical future which the other represents beyond the self. The other signifies as the radical future, as the advent of an absolute *surprise*. This radical surprise is for Levinas phenomenologically the opening of the dimension of time.

In other words, time is for early Levinas structurally eschatological. The primordial experience of time is that of the future, and of the future as the time of salvation - namely of the salvation of the monad from *itself*, or from the inescapable enclosure of its own identity. Envisaged here is a means of 'escape' from Being, from one's *identity*. *Existence and Existents* treads a similar path. The fact of being enchained to one's identity, or the fact of being condemned to oneself, is outlined in greater detail in terms of 'labour', 'weariness' and 'pain': all metaphors for the phenomenological effort involved in the assumption of self-identity at each moment. On the one hand there is the inauthentic future of 'economic time', the time of future moments which serves as mere recompense for effort and for the pain of the assumption of self-identity. Beyond this is glimpsed the horizon of 'Redemption' or of *messianic* time, which signifies as 'exigency for salvation' and the possibility of 'resurrection': all metaphors for the escape from self-identity. The 'resurrection' of the self chained to itself represents the 'annulment of the unimpeachable commitment to the existence made in the instant' (EE 92) The self is in effect to be resurrected from the death which the prison of its own self-enclosure already represents. The 'exigency for salvation' is the 'exigency for the non-definitive', the self's craving to escape from itself and start afresh. (EE93) The other enables this hope in resurrection insofar as it is the event of the opening of time, of the possibility of being 'pardoned' *for* one's identity and indeed *from* one's identity. (EE94)

There are a number of characteristics which distinguish this early form of messianism from others. In the first place, the messianic figure of alterity par excellence in these early texts is that of the feminine: 'I think the absolutely contrary whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to retain absolutely other, is the feminine.' (TO85) The messianic relation par excellence is in turn perceived as the 'erotic relation', the principal form of relation to the feminine being that of the 'caress'. The significance of this messianic relation to the feminine we will explore in the next chapter. For the moment it is also worth noting the relative absence of any reference to Judaism or tropes within the Jewish textual tradition within these early works. We could speculate on the reasons for this, including those of academic

diplomacy which Trigano suggests.<sup>131</sup> What is in any case evident, however, is that it is not simply a question of a youthful terminology later to be replaced by a more suitable one in the articulation of what remains more or less the same vision, but a question of this very vision and the very normative criteria according to which these early texts are governed. The underlying dynamic of these texts appears to lie outside any religious tradition proper: 'The escape of which contemporary literature manifests the strange restlessness appears as the most radical kind of condemnation of the philosophy of being of our generation.' (DE94) The 'escape' from being is a term, in which the messianic horizon first takes on significance in Levinas' philosophical writings, is a term borrowed from 'contemporary literary criticism.' The relation between Levinas and Dostoevsky has received much attention and his citation in *Totality and Infinity* of Rimbaud's maxim that 'the true life is elsewhere' indicates another source of inspiration. Somewhat neglected is the figure of Baudelaire, and yet Levinas closes *Totality and Infinity* with an allusion to the poet, specifically to the 'tedium, fruit of the mournful incuriosity that takes on the proportions of immortality' from which the horizon of the 'eschatological peace' which opens in the face of the other allows us to escape. (TI307) References and allusions to Baudelaire are evident at multiple points in Levinas' oeuvre.<sup>132</sup> There is a definite sense in which the other who allows us to escape from enchainment to our being, escape from the ever identical same, fulfils for Levinas the same function as does Baudelaire's voyagers of 'brightening the ennui of our prisons'. It is not impossible that Levinas aggrandizing of the 'Hebrew' archetype of Abraham, who sets out from his homeland never to return, in face of the 'Greek' Odysseus, whose journey is that of the return to his home and to his self-identity, is not itself based on the Baudelairean archetype of the 'true voyagers' who 'are only those who leave just to be leaving'. Messianism in its earliest formulations in Levinas' philosophical writings appears as a somewhat modernist reflex. The other who awakens the 'exigency of salvation' insofar as being synonymous with the 'exigency of the non-definitive' is immediately understandable in the context of Baudelaire's modernist exhortation 'to the depths of the Unknown to find something new!'<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Trigano, op cit

<sup>132</sup> In *Existence and Existents*, for example, Levinas cites Baudelaire's 'skeletons' as the illustration of the weariness of the labour of assuming one's existence, or those who 'take on the eternity of the pain of existence'. (EE34) In Levinas' appraisal of Gagarin's disappointment at the lack of any sense of encounter with the divine in space, and of the moon landing for whom the 'spectacles jamais vu!' already signify as the "'déjà vu" aux prochaines voyage', who 'do not tear the ideal line which is indeed not the meeting of sky and earth, but which marks the limit of the same' (DQVI23) can still be seen the Bitter is the knowledge one gains from voyaging! / The world, monotonous and small, today, / yesterday, tomorrow, always, shows us our image: An oasis of horror in a desert of ennui!'

<sup>133</sup> Baudelaire, *C Les Fleurs du Mal* (Paris, Editions de La Table Ronde, 1997) 'Le Voyage'

The second principal form of messianism in Levinas' philosophical work is to be found in Levinas' first major work of his mature period, *Totality and Infinity*. Much attention has been paid to the messianic exhortations of this text, found principally in the preface and conclusion; and yet what precisely constitutes the messianic character of this text has never been defined. It is in this text that Levinas outlines the 'relation of eschatological peace' which is to be opposed to the 'ontology of war'. (TI22) What this 'ontology of war' represents and the messianic character of the relation of 'eschatological peace' which is to counter it will be examined in detail. It is in any case based on a transformed concept of alterity relative to that outlined in earlier texts. Rather than the feminine other to whom one relates within the horizon of eros and across the caress, we have the other as interlocutor to whom we relate across the dimension of language. The alterity of the other is articulated via a new form of correlation, that between the face of the other and the idea of the infinite. Levinas appropriates the idea of the infinite from Descartes, not however as a proof of the divine, but as the means of showing how something presents itself to consciousness which cannot be subsumed by it and yet with which consciousness can have nonetheless a relation. This idea receives diverse formulations in Levinas oeuvre: here it signifies an idea whose very meaning is to exceed thought: 'Infinity overflows the thought that thinks it. Its very *infinition* is produced precisely in this overflowing.' (TI25) The idea of the infinite is a dynamic, the dynamic of the infinite overflowing thought. (TI27) The idea of the infinite is the movement whereby consciousness is drawn outside itself, towards that which is exterior to it. This movement of consciousness towards the infinite Levinas calls 'desire', an unquenchable metaphysical desire distinguished both from biological hunger and also erotic desire. The relation with the eschatological 'beyond' of infinity, and the awakening of desire, is accomplished 'concretely' Levinas adds in the relation with the other person. The term infinity, Levinas argues, is merely the 'rigorously developed concept' of 'the gleam of exteriority or of transcendence in the face of the other.' (TI24) The messianic dimension in *Totality and Infinity* thus works upon the basis of a certain correlation between the infinite, a cipher for the divine, and the other person. It is as such that a peaceful relation between self and other can be pitted against an allergic relation of war. The *metaphysical* relation with the infinite, the overflowing or 'movement' in a very literal sense of consciousness, is the most appropriate means available for expressing the *social* movement of the self towards the other.

'The true life is absent' Levinas tell us, citing Rimbaud, '*but*' he adds 'we are in the world'. (TI33) Discernable in *Totality and Infinity*, in other words, is a certain torsion in the face of the modernist thematic of 'escape' which determined the messianism of the earlier works. In



*Totality and Infinity* this modernist impulse is subordinated to another, one which mobilizes a more overtly Jewish vocabulary for its articulation. The eschatological relation established in the correlation of the other person and the idea of the infinite signifies a metaphysical and peaceful relation with the other in the face of the allergic relation which founds the experience of reality as war, and as such is principally to serve as the condition of possibility for any morality. The goal is no longer to *escape* but rather to *judge* being. The relation of eschatological peace both renders possible and demands, despite the inescapable fact of the reality of war, the exercise of moral *judgment*: ‘the eschatological, as the “beyond” of history, draws being out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them and calls them forth to their full responsibility.’ (TI23) In the same fashion that the expectation of future redemption is reduced to the more primordial intentional meaning of relation with exteriority, so also is the eschatological ‘last judgment’ subject to a reduction: ‘It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants of time, when the living are judged.’ (TI23) Each moment represents the last and first judgment; at each moment history can be subject to judgment without having to wait for whatever particular results arise from whatever historical situation. Targeted here is any model of theodicy, and especially the Hegelian secularized model of historical teleology, in which present suffering could be sacrificed for the future: ‘the eschatological notion of judgment . . . implies that beings have an identity “before” eternity, before the accomplishment of history.’ (TI23) Restored by the eschatological relation is the Kantian power to abstract from historical conditions in the exercise of morality. Envisaged however, is not the articulation of principles of universal legislation or moral absolutes. Or alternatively, there is only one moral absolute, the messianic dimension, that which accomplishes itself concretely in the face of the other. This moral absolute does not facilitate or in any way orient judgment; it simply demands it.

It is only when we reach the third form of messianism, that corresponding to the second major work of Levinas’ mature period *Otherwise than Being*, that we reach anything approaching the ‘messianism of self-becoming’ as Plüss defines it. *Otherwise than Being* introduces not only an entirely new vocabulary for the expression of the relation with the other, one which appropriates to an even greater extent concepts and thematic from the Jewish textual tradition, but presents us once more with a relation with alterity transformed in several significant respects. The relation with the other no longer occurs across language or ‘conversation’, but rather across the dimension of sensibility. The relation with the other takes place on the ‘underside’ of subjectivity. (OB49) It takes place as such across the ‘exposure’ and ‘vulnerability’ of the self to the other: ‘the subjectivity of a subject is vulnerability,

exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity'. (OB50) The other comes into contact with the self at the point where it can offer no defence against the other. On the basis of this, a chain of metaphors follow. 'The one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it, as a cheek is offered to the smiter.' (OB49) The self is the one who, at the most fundamental level of its being, offers no resistance to the other, is exposed in passivity to the other. The self is 'persecuted' by the other, the other 'traumatises' the self. (OB111) The self is the 'hostage' of the other. (OB124) At the same time, the self is nonetheless 'inspired' by the other. (OB67) The 'inspiration' of the self by the other is precisely the inspiration to self-identity. It is in the recoil or 'recurrence' into itself before the trauma of the pure exposure to the other that the self becomes precisely itself. The 'persecution' of the self by the other is also an 'assignation' or 'election' of the self by the other, an election to subjectivity and selfhood by the other. The self is elected namely to a responsibility as infinite as was desire in *Totality and Infinity*. The self becomes something of an Atlas figure, who is assigned to take on responsibility for the suffering and indeed the sins of the other and by extension all others. It is here that the notion of self as Messiah becomes intelligible. We might add that, despite certain residues, the modernist thematic of Levinas' earlier work has thus effectively been suppressed when the 'recurrence' to selfhood and identity, that from which the relation with the other in *Time and the Other* was to allow the self to 'messianically' escape, becomes that to which the other assigns the 'self as messiah' in *Otherwise than Being*.

We have taken the time to present in some detail the different presentations of messianism in Levinas' oeuvre in order to demonstrate the first principle thesis of our study: we have here evidently not one form of messianism but at least three different forms of messianism. How is it possible then for the majority of commentators to consider all three as belonging to one, coherent messianic paradigm, that belonging precisely only to the final stage of Levinas' oeuvre? It is possible only if messianism in Levinas is considered in evolutionary terms. Plüss, going through a list of messianic tropes present both in Levinas' 'Jewish' and 'philosophical' writings, declares all as preliminary stages leading towards the denouement of the messianic task of the self. 'Ultimately Levinas questions whether the self-consciousness of man, the I-saying, is not the place in which the messianic message arrives at its most authentic expression.'<sup>134</sup> Bergo reiterates this position in particular in exploring the evolution of Levinas' messianic vision from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*. 'The

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<sup>134</sup> Plüss, *Das Messianische* p196

problem of messianism' writes Bergo, 'exceeds *Totality and Infinity*'. *Totality and Infinity* 'lacked an adequate conceptual armature to address this theme' she adds. 'Messianic consciousness and prophetism concern OBBE above all.'<sup>135</sup> It is only with *Otherwise than Being*, that is, that messianism in Levinas comes into its own. Kavka for his part refers to the 'heightening' of messianic discourse in *Otherwise than Being*.<sup>136</sup> For Ajzenstat, *Otherwise than Being*'s messianism of the self represents the 'highest point' of Levinas' messianic vision by virtue of its completion of Levinas' project of the de-historicizing or de-teleologising of messianism.<sup>137</sup> Under this paradigm, the diversity of Levinas' messianic formulations can be disregarded, insofar as all attempts at formulating the messianic dimension in Levinas become but the incipient expression of the messianism of *Otherwise than Being*. *Otherwise than Being* is the culmination of Levinas' theorizing on messianism; all previous expressions are incomplete in themselves and in their incompleteness point towards it.

This allows us to formulate the second principle thesis of this study on messianism in Levinas. Not only would we reiterate that across Levinas' oeuvre we are faced with not one form of messianism, be it incipient or fully realized, but at least three discrete models, we would add to this another judgment concerning this evolutionary dynamic of the realization of the messianic dimension with *Otherwise than Being*. What unites the discrete models is not for us the trajectory of the *culmination* or gradual *realization* of the messianic dimension in its most authentic form; Levinas' oeuvre is determined by another trajectory, that of the progressive *disappearance* of messianism.

### Salvation and Sanctification

According to the general consensus, we noted, the presence of messianism in Levinas is to be an expression of, indeed perhaps the principal expression and very means of articulating, an essential or essentialized correlation between 'Judaism' and 'Philosophy'. There are two possible ways of interrogating this thesis. On the one hand, one could question the possibility of the very notion of a 'correlation' between 'Judaism' and 'Philosophy'. On the other hand, one could assume that such a correlation is possible, and yet question whether this correlation occurs on a basis other than that of messianism.

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<sup>135</sup> Bergo, BD *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth* (Kluwer, Academic Publishers, 1999) pp131-133

<sup>136</sup> Kavka, *Jewish Messianism* p179

<sup>137</sup> See Ajzenstat, *Driven Back to the Text* p265 for a similar presentation

With regards to the first question, the essentialised construct produced by those in favour of the correlation model, alongside the somewhat apologetic fashion in which this model is often articulated, cannot fail to raise suspicion. There have already been significant voices of dissent. We have already noted Rose's objection to the 'pilgrimage' from 'Athens' to a 'phantasized' Jerusalem, one which ignores that this 'Jerusalem' is beset with the very same aporias as 'Athens'.<sup>138</sup> In another sense, Kosky rejects the attempts of Gibbs and Cohen to frame Levinas as a 'Jewish philosopher'. For Kosky, any attempt to do so leaves itself exposed to critiques of the likes of Janicaud for whom, as we noted, Levinas' work represents the 'hijacking' of phenomenology by 'theology'. What Levinas rather presents us with is a phenomenological reduction of Judaism to its apparently most primordial level, that namely of a certain ethics or humanism. This is a humanism which necessitates appeal to a certain notion of transcendence, not as a postulate but as the very substance of this ethics. This is a transcendence, Kosky argues, which can be articulated in terms entirely understandable to philosophy and in no way requires adherence to a particular religious tradition, be it Judaism or any other.<sup>139</sup>

In general, critique of the correlation thesis with regards to Levinas is directed less against the notion of correlation as such than against overly essentialized terms of the correlation thesis in which it has been framed. Wright underlines namely that Levinas' Talmudic writings are in no sense merely commentaries on the Talmud, but are rather creative interpretations of the Jewish textual tradition according to his own particular vision.<sup>140</sup> Wright gives a list of areas in which Levinas departs at times quite radically from the concerns of the Talmudic texts: the notion of an ethical nucleus, the command coming from the other, which can be abstracted from the mitzvoth and to which the mitzvoth can be reduced has little to do, argues Wright, with the tradition of Talmudic commentary and everything to do with Levinas. It is Newton who offers the most in depth critique of any essentialised correlation: 'the Judaism that shines through Levinas' prose' argues Newton, 'like the prose itself, is distinctive, inimitable, personally "signed". It is also at times less self-evident or unambiguous as Levinas may assume'.

<sup>141</sup> The particularity of Levinas' vision of the Talmud, argues Newton echoing Wright, boils down to its overly Aggadic tendency: 'Levinas is best described . . . as Aggadic in his relation

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<sup>138</sup> Rose op cit

<sup>139</sup> Kosky, J *Levinas and the Philosophy of Religion* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2001)

<sup>140</sup> Wright, *Twilight of Jewish Philosophy* p160

<sup>141</sup> Newton, A.Z *The Fence and the Neighbour: Emmanuel Levinas, Yeshayahu Leibowitz and Israel Among the Nations* (New York, State University of New York, 2001) p24

to the Halakhah, and idiosyncratic – Levinasian? - in his use of the Aggadah'.<sup>142</sup> Halakhah signifies the legal aspect of the Jewish canon, the passages relating to the exegesis of the Mishnaic law code in the two Talmuds, whereas the Aggadah signifies certain legends, parables, allegories, tales woven into and around this exegesis. Newton emphasizes the peculiarity of Levinas' understanding of Halakhah: the particularistic law which is for Rabbinic Judaism an end in itself, is rendered by Levinas' Aggadic Judaism into a cipher for a more fundamental universal and philosophical meaning, an 'allegory or modality of ethical responsibility.' Newton also emphasizes the peculiarity of Levinas' understanding of Aggadah, insofar precisely as it becomes the embodiment of this meaning. Levinas idiosyncratically renders Aggadah into a *universalizable* 'philosophical anthropology' and subsequently decodes the entire Talmud in terms of it, bypassing the *particularistic* focus of the Talmud as that which is to govern Jewish life precisely as life separated from other peoples. Newton is one of at least three scholars who have emphasised the range of possible contemporary understandings of Judaism in contrasting the theocentric Judaism of Levinas' contemporary Leibowitz, for whom the law is to be obeyed not for any humanistic core which can be abstracted from it but simply because it is commanded by God, with the anthropocentric Judaism of Levinas who holds the contrary.<sup>143</sup>

There is one aspect of Newton's critique of the essentialized correlation model which we wish to emphasize. Newton writes of the 'the unique *syncretis* Levinas was able to accomplish' between philosophy and Judaism, one which could not be rendered as universal model, and what makes this rapprochement unique.<sup>144</sup> What indicates the uniqueness, the idiosyncrasy, of Levinas' rapprochement is the humanistic core to which both 'Philosophy' and 'Judaism' have to be reduced in order to render it possible. The reduction to the interhuman realm is a constant throughout Levinas' Talmudic writings: the return to the Torah is 'the return of man to his true humanity'. (AV69) Judaism in its post-holocaust phase for Levinas is to embody a 'difficult freedom' in which the apparent absence or radical concealment of God serves only to heighten the ethical responsibility of each individual in the face of all others in a world without any assurances. (DL202) It is a Judaism in which only the other person, and not God, can forgive wrongs against them. (QLT21) This is a Judaism in which we are to 'love the Torah more than God', to love the ethical meaning which the Torah embodies. As Newton frames it 'Levinas prizes the love of Torah over the love of God – because it is a Torah of and for men – but that Torah is something other than Torah for its

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid p46

<sup>143</sup> Namely Newton, op cit Wright, op cit and Banon D. 'E. Levinas et Y. Leibovitz' in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et judaïsme* ed. by D. Cohen-Levinas and S. Trigano (Paris, In Press Editions 2002) pp57–86.

<sup>144</sup> Newton, Fence and Neighbour p177

own sake.’ It is rather an ‘austere humanism’ and ‘exaltation of man.’<sup>145</sup> The correlation between ‘Philosophy’ and ‘Judaism’ cannot at all be essentialised but ultimately takes place in Levinas quite idiosyncratically across the ‘exaltation of man’.<sup>146</sup>

We would be willing to accept this qualified model of the correlation thesis, one which emphasises its idiosyncrasy. We would suggest, however, that it renders the question of that which is correlated of secondary importance to the dynamic across which this idiosyncratic correlation takes place: the dynamic of the ‘exaltation of man’. Indeed this already lays the basis for our second line of interrogation: is messianism really the principal expression of any such correlation? If not then what place does it have within this correlation? It is worth here returning to the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, which represents Levinas’ most conspicuous appeal to the eschatological dimension. The eschatological dimension in *Totality and Infinity* takes on the function, we noted, of providing the condition of possibility for any morality insofar as rendering the ‘last judgement’ possible at each moment. This is how Levinas describes this judgment:

We oppose to the objectivism of war a subjectivity born from the eschatological vision. The idea of infinity delivers the subjectivity from the judgment of history to declare it ready for judgment at every moment and, as we shall show, called to participate in this judgment, impossible without it. (TI25)

By the ‘judgment of history’ against the background of the ‘objectivism of war’ Levinas intends a critique of Hegel and in particular Kojève’s Hegel: ‘Let us suppose, then, that a man assassinates his king for political reasons. He believes he is acting well. But the others treat him as a criminal, arrest him, and put him to death. In these conditions he actually is a criminal. Thus the given social World, just like the natural World, can transform a human truth (a “subjective” truth – i.e. a “certainty” ) into error. But let us suppose that the assassin in question starts a victorious revolution. At once society treats the assassin as a hero. And in these conditions he actually is a hero, a model of virtue and good citizenship, a human ideal. Man can therefore transform a crime into virtue, a moral or anthropological error into truth.’<sup>147</sup> If ‘reality is war’, in other words, that which is moral or true is that which is able to *assert* itself as moral or true. Of course for Hegel no such assertion is ultimately possible since the ‘judgment of history’ is precisely the ruse through which alien necessities are

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<sup>145</sup> Ibid p42

<sup>146</sup> ‘Exaltation of man’ is a citation taken by Newton from DL206

<sup>147</sup> Kojève, *A Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York, Cornell University Press, 1980) p190

imposed on all individuals in their reciprocal negation of each other precisely through their efforts at self-assertion. The function of Levinas' eschatological vision in *Totality and Infinity* is in any case that of serving as a corrective to this judgement on all its levels. The everyday face to face relation with the other is a relation with a transcendence embodying a meaning immune to the vicissitudes of history. Yet what becomes of the eschatological dimension once it is so construed? Bielik-Robson contrasts it with the 'hot' messianism impatient for the end of the likes of Taubes and Agamben.<sup>148</sup> What is evident is that it is no longer concerned, as Epstein argues, with any notion of an expectation of an end to history in any form, neither as its telos nor as its simple termination. The relation with the infinite, accomplished 'concretely' in the relation with the alterity of the other, induces the individual to 'step outside' of history at each moment, it 'deracinates' the individual from the objective historical conditions in which it is mired, providing thus the conditions through which it can judge these conditions.<sup>149</sup> Levinas himself writes as much: 'Though of myself I am not exterior to history, I do find in the other a point which is absolute with regards to history . . . History is worked over by the ruptures of history, in which a judgement is borne upon it. When man truly approaches the other he is uprooted from history.' (TI52) This 'uprooting from history' is indeed a point of correlation between Levinas' philosophical writings and Talmudic commentaries: the 'uprooting from history' which the relation with the other grants the individual finds its corollary in the uprooting from history which adherence to the law, liturgy, and study of the Torah grants the Jewish community. (DL41)

Messianism in Levinas is transformed from the expectation of an immanent end to history to the ability to step outside of history at each moment. Our question is the following: is this 'stepping outside history' or 'uprooting from history' in fact messianism? Is it possible that another dynamic is at work here? Levinas' vision of Judaism, as many commentators and Levinas himself tell us, is strongly Rabbinic, which is to say Levinas' Judaism is a rationalistic indeed intellectualistic Judaism strongly committed to the study of the Torah interpreted through the rabbinic eyes of the Talmud. What consequences does this have for Levinas' notion of messianism? With reference to the dynamic of the 'uprooting from history' to which messianism in *Totality and Infinity* is tied, appeal to an authority on the subject is irresistible. Neusner in his work on messianism in the Jewish canon asks the following

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<sup>148</sup> Bielik-Robson, A 'Tarrying with the Apocalypse: The Wary Messianism of Rosenzweig and Levinas' *Journal for Cultural Research* Vol13, No3/4 (2009) pp249-266

<sup>149</sup> Epstein, D 'Contre L'Utopie, Pour L'Utopisme', *Cahiers d'Etudes Lévinassiennes* 4 (2005) pp87-104

question: ‘does Judaism present a messianism, and may we therefore speak of the messianic idea or doctrine of Judaism?’<sup>150</sup>

‘No’ is ultimately his answer, at least as far as the formative canon is concerned. Neusner traces the development of the formulation of the messianic dimension in the canon from the framing of the Mishnah to the compilation of the Babylonian Talmud. This development is decisively marked, Neusner argues, by the fact that its foundation document, the *Mishnah*, frames itself in entirely non-messianic terms. Messianism, as it develops in the context of the wake of the destruction of the first Temple and subsequent rebuilding, grew out of Judaism characterised essentially by a concern with history, Israel’s place in it and God’s plan of salvation for Israel within it. The *Mishnah* however, arising out of the context of the destruction of the Second Temple and the catastrophic, messianically inspired *Bar Kokhba* rebellion, effects a radical change of orientation. It articulates itself namely in terms of a radical indifference to the dimension of history, and re-orientation towards ‘a timeless eternity governed by orderly rules.’<sup>151</sup> The *Mishnah* distinguishes itself principally by its concern with taxonomy, in articulating the eternal, unchanging categories in which all things in the world have their place, and in cultic purity. Thus, on the one hand, the *Mishnah* is concerned with the static, eternal and unchanging: ‘In the *Mishnah*’s world, all things aim at stasis both in nature and in society, with emphasis upon proper order and correct form.’<sup>152</sup> The world of the *Mishnah* is that of the ‘eternal rhythm which centred on the movement of the moon and stars and seasons.’<sup>153</sup> On the other hand, the *Mishnah* is orientated towards a thoroughly a-historical and non-messianic teleology, that namely of the sanctification of Israel through law and liturgy, the teleological goal being ‘the clean and the holy’ in which Israel would take its own unique place in the eternal order ordained by God. Jewish life was one to be lived outside of time and the vicissitudes of history, however apocalyptic they might be. This is not to say that there are not traces of messianism in the *Mishnah*; yet these are, as Neusner argues, ‘like the rubble which has been left after a building has been completed.’<sup>154</sup> This building is namely the closed order of eternally recurring sanctification, open to no surprises or irregularities.

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<sup>150</sup> Neusner, *J Messiah in Context: Israel’s History and Destiny in Formative Judaism* (Lanham, University Press of America, 1988) p ix

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid* p268

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid* p269

<sup>153</sup> ‘Messianic Themes in Formative Judaism’ in *Messianism through History* ed. by Beuken, W, Freyne, S, Weiler, A (London, SCM Press, 1993) pp89-115 (p99)

<sup>154</sup> Neusner *Messiah in Context*, ix



Progressively, Neusner relates, the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmuds would fill out the Mishnah's law code with messianic tropes. These would not, however, alter the fundamentally non-messianic structure which the Mishnah had dictated. The messianism integrated into the Talmud was one shaped according to the worldview of the Mishnah. The Messiah became that which 'expresses the system's meaning and so makes it work.' Salvation, that is, was that promised through correct performance of ritual sanctification in indifference to all historical circumstances. The Mishnaic code in its entirety could receive via the Messiah myth the coherence not so much in view of invoking the coming of the Messiah, but rather in view of making Israel *worthy* of the Messiah's coming. The symbolic system of eschatology was shaped according to the Mishnah's dynamic of sanctification, to the teleology of 'becoming holy'. The dynamic of sanctification proper to the Mishnah, that is, was 'garbed in the language of salvation'.<sup>155</sup> Neusner explains this more fully elsewhere: 'when the canon of Judaism had reached the end of its formative period, it presented a version of the Messiah-myth entirely congruent to the character of the foundation-document, the Mishnah. Judaism emerging from late antiquity then would deliver to Israel an enduring message of timeless sanctification, garbed in the cloak of historical, and hence eschatological salvation.'<sup>156</sup>

In sum Neusner plays off against each other the dynamics of sanctification and salvation, of messianism in effect, arguing that Judaism in its rabbinic form is determined by the former rather than the latter. In the earliest phase of the canon, messianism is more or less neglected, whereas in the later phase it is made to dance to another's tune. 'Judaism in its formative canon does not fall into the classification of a messianic religion. It makes use of messianic materials to make its own statements.'<sup>157</sup> Yet does Levinas' 'messianism' of the 'stepping outside' of or 'uprooting from' history not correspond to this dynamic of sanctification which Neusner identifies as the dynamic most fundamental to the Mishnah – that precisely of the stepping outside of history into eternity? Could it be that Levinas' presentation of this stepping outside of history as eschatological corresponds to the later Talmudic garbing of the dynamic of sanctification in the language of salvation? Could it be therefore that, if there is to be any 'correlation' between 'Judaism' and 'philosophy' in Levinas, this correlation has nothing to do with messianism or any dynamic of salvation but rather of sanctification? 'The word ethics is Greek' Levinas recounts in a later interview 'More often, especially now, I

<sup>155</sup> Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, p231

<sup>156</sup> 'Mishnah and Messiah' in *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* ed. by Neusner, J, Green, W, Frerichs, E (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press) pp265-282 (p277)

<sup>157</sup> Neusner, *Messiah in Context*, p231

think about the *holiness* of the face or the *holiness* of obligation as such.’<sup>158</sup> Language, or the relation with the other as interlocutor, argues Levinas ‘is perhaps to be defined as the very power to break the continuity of being or of history.’ How as such is language to be defined? : ‘The formal structure of language thereby announces the ethical inviolability of the other and, without any odour of the “numinous”, his “holiness”’. (TI195) The relation with the other is determined by the stepping outside of history into ‘holiness’.

There would be at least three questions to be asked of any such thesis. Levinas’ Judaism, as amongst others Ajzenstat in particular emphasises, is a post-holocaust Judaism. This would render problematic any notion of a dynamic of sanctification in the mode of the Mishnah’s integration into an eternal order. Any dynamic of sanctification at work in Levinas surely does not involve the integration of the holocaust into an eternal order, and Levinas’ God as a radically absent God is not conducive to a vision of transcendence around which an eternal order can be erected. Of course it is precisely with the impossibility of this aspect of the Mishnaic informed universe that Ajzenstat’s tracing of Levinas’ return to the texts of the rabbinic tradition in the wake of the holocaust must engage. Secondly, as indicated, Levinas offers an ‘idiosyncratic’ aggadically structured reading of the Jewish canon. His reading of the dynamic of sanctification at work in this tradition would thus also have to be structured accordingly. This ‘Aggadic’ vision of Judaism is, furthermore, not based on the humble and passive acceptance of an eternal order ordained by God but on the ‘exaltation of man’. In what sense the dynamic of sanctification corresponds to this dynamic of exaltation will also have to be determined.

### Messianism and the Sanctification/Fetishisation of the Human

We have outlined so far two of the theses which will guide our consideration of messianism in Levinas, and are in the process of outlining a third. This third thesis is emerging as follows: if Levinas’ work is structured according to a ‘correlation’ between Judaism and philosophy, this correlation, a correlation of secondary importance to that across which the correlation takes place, does not take place across any theory of messianism. The epicentre of Levinas’ ‘idiosyncratic’ vision according to which both Judaism and philosophy are marshalled and within which they are restructured is rather a dynamic of sanctification. ‘Messianism’ insofar as it has a place in Levinas is the dynamic of salvation in which this dynamic of sanctification

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<sup>158</sup> Robbins J (Ed) *Is it Righteous To Be? Interviews with Emmanuel Levinas* (California, Stanford University Press, 2001) p49

is 'garbed'. This amounts, we are suggesting, to something approaching the notion of the parody of messianism we explored in the last chapter on Rosenzweig. It is worth noting that we are not pitting the thesis of the parody of messianism in Levinas against that of messianism as an expression of the correlation between Judaism and Philosophy. In fact we are suggesting that the question of the parody of messianism is by and large *indifferent* to the question of correlation. Put more controversially, the parody of messianism may precisely be an expression of this correlation, an intensification of a tendency inherent to Judaism as much as it is a Nietzschean gesture. This thesis is perhaps not so controversial: Neusner himself suggests that the common fate of messianism in both Judaism and early Christianity was that ultimately of becoming a parody of itself.<sup>159</sup> Lenowitz, moreover, traces throughout its history what could be called a parody structural to messianism in the Jewish tradition, a messianic drama periodically re-enacted in which all players are conscious of their roles and the end towards which they are leading.<sup>160</sup> In any case what is of prime concern here is not the relation between Judaism and philosophy across messianism, but the relation between salvation or messianism and the dynamic of sanctification undergirding it and structuring it. The question here with regards to this structuring is how and why?

With regards to how, Levinas' well known distinction between 'need' and 'desire' in *Totality and Infinity* is illuminating. Need is determined by a sense of emptiness and the impulse to fill this emptiness by whatever means appropriate or available. Need represents the negation of the otherness of the world via the satisfaction of impulses, labour, possession etc, the absorbing of alterity into the sphere of the same. There is a *gulf*, Levinas argues, which separates 'need' as the negation of relative alterity from 'desire' as the search for authentic non-neutralisable alterity: 'Besides the hunger one satisfies, the thirst one quenches and the senses one allays, metaphysics desires the other beyond satisfactions.' (TI34) Desire is a pure metaphysical impulse, not based on a sense of emptiness but rather of excess. Rather than functioning according to a void *within* the self to be filled, desire represents the attraction towards that which is always beyond the self. Unlike need, Levinas adds, desire is infinite,

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<sup>159</sup> See Neusner, *Messiah in Context* p227/8

<sup>160</sup> Lenowitz *The Jewish Messiahs: from the Galilee to Crown Heights* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1998) p5: messianic fervor represents for Lenowitz a periodically necessary cathartic outburst. "Jewish messiahs are central figures in rituals that are performed by Jewish societies in disarray; the rituals included their own sad endings, which are both inevitable and necessary. The accounts of the ritual participate, then go to program later performances of the ritual . . . they all act out their parts to the end, as if they were players in a dramatic performance. This performance is the ritual of the messiah and is occasionally reenacted when some members of the society perceive the community as being under intolerable stress. The Jewish community and the larger society are partners in the ritual dance of destruction; they come together to destroy the messiah, then move apart to resume their old positions in the status quo. In the context of the ritual, the messiah does not actually ignite the flames of the apocalypse; rather, his immolation sheds light on what a society must do in order to go on."

impossible of ever being satisfied: the more the infinite is sought, the more precisely it is desired. Metaphysical desire is the impossible desire for pure alterity, an alterity without any reference to the identity of the self. 'Desire is desire for the absolutely other', writes Levinas, 'whose positivity comes from remoteness, from separation.' (TI34) This infinite desire, or desire for the infinite is aroused, Levinas argues exclusively in the face of the other. The face, unlike other objects, can express itself, is indeed for Levinas pure self-expression. The appeal which this expression of the other to the self represents breaks the ego's self-enclosed circuit of need and satisfaction, calling the ego to the voyage of Abraham, to leave its homeland, or its self-identity, never to return.

As the preface of *Totality and Infinity* can be understood as a critique of the Hegelian philosophy of history, mediated in particular through Kojève, so can the sharp distinction drawn between need and desire is immediately recognisable as a response to the Hegelian notion of desire likewise expounded by Kojève and which deeply informs Sartre's account of the relation with the other in *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>161</sup> For Kojève's Hegel, there is likewise a distinction to be made not between need and desire but two forms of desire: 'Human Desire must be directed towards another Desire. For there to be human Desire, there must first be a multiplicity of (animal) Desires.'<sup>162</sup> Desire begins with pure animal desire, that which corresponds to need in Levinas or the immediate satisfaction of a void via the negation and absorption of whatever part of the world can fill this void: 'Desire taken as Desire is but a revealed nothingness, an unreal emptiness.'<sup>163</sup> This changes, however, whenever one desire meets not simply another object but another desire. In this case 'desire', specifically the desire which the other represents, 'is the revelation of an emptiness, the presence of the absence of a reality, is something essentially different from the desired thing.'<sup>164</sup> The desire of the self, the power of negation, is faced with another power of negation or *nothingness* which the desire of the other represents in the horizon of his experience. This negation of another negation calls for a different kind of negation from that exercised on a simple object. It is this transformed act of negating which gives birth to the human 'I' proper separate from mere animal persistence in one's identity. To be precise, from this encounter with another desire ensues the master-slave dialectic, an act of negation which cannot involve the pure negation or neutralisation of the other, but rather the marshalling of the otherness of the other person or his negation power to the ends of the self. The victorious self

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<sup>161</sup> Peperzaak *Beyond: The Philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas* (Illinois, North Western University Press, 1997) and Ajzenstat op cit consider in some detail the importance of Kojève for *Totality and Infinity*.

<sup>162</sup> Kojève, Hegel p5

<sup>163</sup> Ibid p6

<sup>164</sup> Ibid

requires ‘recognition’ from the defeated other, and subsequently to put the other to work for himself. This is how Kojève recounts the point of departure of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic from the perspective of the self:

Now, in the beginning, he sees in the other only the aspect of an animal. To know that this aspect reveals a human reality, he must see that the other also wants to be recognized, and that he, too, is ready to risk, to “deny” his animal life in a fight for the recognition of his human being-for-itself. He must, therefore, “provoke” the other, force him to start a fight to the death for pure prestige.<sup>165</sup>

In this inhuman fight to the death, in which self and other start out as animals to each other, there is at the same time the border crossing into humanity, indicated in the very need for recognition by another human reality. The master-slave dialectic in Kojève’s reading recounts essentially the crossing of the border from inhumanity to humanity, a border crossing which likewise for Marx was to be realized dialectically via history. The very dialectic by which the slave is yoked to the labour imposed upon for the ends of the master is also the very mechanism by which the principle of humanity is revealed. The deferral of the satisfaction of the animal desires of the slave via the dimension of work is the condition for the *Bildung* of the slave, as that which creates the deferral of satisfaction required for the cultivation of self-consciousness. Hegel proposes, that is, a *continuum* between animal and human desire in which each is always to some extent in admixture with the other, a continuum in which humanity is incubated within conditions of inhumanity.

It is just such a crossing from the inhuman to the human or indeed of any admixture of or continuum between these elements that Levinas in his account of desire denies. Among the many dark historical shadows cast over Levinas’ work, principal at least insofar as *Totality and Infinity* is concerned is the culmination of the Marxist vision in Stalinism or what Levinas calls both the ‘greatest disappointment’ and ‘greatest betrayal’ of any humanist project, would appear to deny any possibility of such a crossing or continuum. Thus if there is to be any humanism at all, it must be one where a meaning of the human can be found which borrows nothing from, and is utterly *set apart* from, the inhuman. The *continuum* between the two desires proposed by Hegel is confronted with the unbridgeable *gulf* between need and desire in Levinas, where both nodes of Hegel’s continuum find themselves on the wrong side. It is

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid p13

here that we begin to see the specifically ‘Aggadic’ sense of the dynamic of sanctification which Levinas proposes. Levinas is concerned, we noted, not so much with the dimension of ‘ethics’ but with the dimension of ‘holiness’ in interpersonal relations. Derrida recalls a conversation with Levinas on the topic: ‘People often speak of ethics in order to describe what I do, but what interests me ultimately is not ethics, not only ethics, it is the holy, the holiness of the holy (le saint, la sainteté du saint).’<sup>166</sup> What is this ‘holiness’? It is, Levinas tells us ‘the ascension to the human in being’.<sup>167</sup>

In giving a more detailed account of this dimension of the ‘holiness’ of the human, Levinas comes to a surprising conclusion:

‘The word ethics is Greek; More often, especially now, I think about the holiness of the face or the holiness of obligation as such. So be it! There is holiness in the face but above all there is holiness or the ethical in relation to oneself in a comportment which encounters the face as face, where the obligation with respect to the other is imposed before all obligation: to respect the other, to take the other into account, to let him pass before oneself. And courtesy! Yes, that is very good, to let the other pass before I do; this little effort of courtesy is also an access to the face. Why should you pass before me?’<sup>168</sup>

It is the dimension of *courtesy*, of *politeness*, which for Levinas becomes ‘the road that can lead to holiness’ It is also the dimension with which Levinas concludes *Otherwise than Being* the major product of his mature period, representing something of the terminus, the very impasse as we will argue, of this road. That courtesy ultimately should be the alpha and omega of Levinasian ethics is rendered immediately intelligible when considered next to the model of the relation with the other against which it is formulated. The situation of courtesy, at least insofar as Levinas presents it as the self putting the other before itself offers a neatly symmetrical opposite to the struggle between master and slave in its Hegelian or Sartrean form. In the question of the ‘holiness’ of the human as such, as the other before the self, that is, at stake is a symmetrical opposition namely with the inhuman, or the dimension of the self before the other, an incorruptible separation. As Levinas tells us on numerous occasions, his goal is to ‘say nobly the human in man, to think the humanity of the human’ (‘dire noblement l’humain dans l’homme, penser l’humanité dans l’homme’). (HAH96) In the strange doubling up of the human indicated in the phrase the ‘humanity of the human’, a phrase often employed by Levinas, is indicated the function of the dynamic of sanctification in Levinas: humanism

<sup>166</sup> Derrida, *J Adieu à Emmanuel Levinas* (Paris, Galilée, 1997) p15

<sup>167</sup> Robbins (ed) *Interviews* p109

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid* p49

becomes no longer a question of *expansion* but of *contraction*. The sanctification of the human effects the contraction of the human into its core from which an inalienable and incorruptible intelligibility can be articulated, a core whose intelligibility is removed from all possible contact with the inhuman. The human is to be removed from all contact with the inhuman even within itself: the human rests upon the inhuman as oil on water.

In appealing to the dimension of the holiness of the human Levinas appears in other words to appeal to its most primordial sense. Derrida notices this: 'Ethics, the word ethics is no more than an approximate equivalent, a Greek *pis-aller* for the Hebraic discourse on the holiness of the separated (kadosh), especially not to be confused with the sacred.' Derrida is following here Levinas' insistence that 'holiness' is not to be confused with the 'sacred', a 'pagan' concept apparently necessarily involving ecstatic participation in the divine rather than the separation of an ethically responsible subject. Holiness is rather one with pure 'separation'. In appealing to the holy as such Levinas appears, however, to reduce it to its most basic dimension where it is indistinguishable from the sacred. The holiness of the human is namely the *sanctus* of the human, that which is divided from or split off. Levinas appeals precisely to the element of the sacred in the holy, the human as that which is *set apart*. The human is that which is to be set apart from the inhuman as the sacred is from the profane. The dynamic of sanctification is the dynamic in which the human sets itself apart, separates itself from the inhuman, and indeed from the 'human' in the 'humanity of the human'. The human must become that which is utterly separated, immured. It is to become the dimension utterly self-enclosed and integral to itself, the dimension utterly unassailable, kept apart from the inhuman with holy dread. We could of course point to the fact, as Derrida himself in some respects indicates, that Levinas offers a privative definition of the human: the human is defined as that which is definitively not inhuman, as that in the human which never could be inhuman; the human as that which 'jealously guards itself' and its inalienable integrity from the inhuman.<sup>169</sup> Levinas' humanism takes on its character in particular in the wake of the humanism defined by the Marxist project of disalienation. Levinas in a later work, one which speaks for all the work of Levinas' mature period, writes of the anguish before the 'omnipresent threat of inhumanity': 'The anguish is today more profound. It arises from the experience of revolutions sinking into bureaucracy and totalitarian violence and repression

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<sup>169</sup> Derrida, J 'At this very moment in this work, here I am' in *Face to Face with Levinas*, ed. by Cohen R (New York, State University Press of New York, 1987) p46 'He, the one who has passed beyond all Being, must be exempt from all jealousy, from all desire for possession, guarding, property, exclusivity, nonsubstitution, etc. And the link to Him must be pure of all jealous economy. But this without-jealousy cannot be jealously guard against itself, and insofar as it is an absolutely reserved past, it is the very possibility of all jealousy.'

passing themselves off for revolutions. Because in these disalienation as such is alienated from itself. (Car, en elles, s'aliène la désaliénation elle-même.) (HAH98) The 'virile' project of the realization of humanity via disalienation has resulted in a form of alienation, a form of inhumanity, ever more virulent than that which the humanist project was to overcome. Thus the project of the *realization* of the human *against* the inhuman becomes the project of the *setting apart* of the human from *within* the inhuman.

We have noted Newton's underlining of the idiosyncratic character of Levinas' Aggadic Judaism. Levinas wishes to strike a correlation between philosophy and Judaism based on 'the holy'. Newton emphasizes in particular, however, that Levinas' aggadically inspired construction of a universal anthropology from the sources of the rabbinic tradition ignores the particularise of this tradition from which it drew its very vitality. The world of 'Halakhah' man is a world 'recomposed and mapped' by law, a world of dividing and separating, a separating namely of mundane life and sacred life lived in Halakhah, the 'fencing off' of the latter from the former, of Jewish from non-Jewish life. Levinas' universalised, Aggadic Judaism ignores, Newton argues, the particularise involved in the 'the very Jewish penchant, halakhically at least, for fencing in and fencing out'.<sup>170</sup> Yet this is not entirely true. Levinas' does preserve precisely in his idiosyncratic Aggadic sense, this dynamic of 'fencing out'. It is simply the case that this dynamic of sanctification in Levinas is now determined, one might say, by the project of 'creating a fence' for the human. 'The problem with Levinas' Caputo argues, 'is that he has made ethics into a holy of holies, an inviolable inner sanctum, pure and uncontaminated', 'holy and set apart.'<sup>171</sup> We fail to see how this dynamic is problematic as such. Indeed, seen in the light of its reaction against Kojève and the reasons for this reaction, Levinas' strategy of sanctification appears entirely intelligible. Of course certain problems follow from the model Levinas proposes, as they do for any model, and some indeed pose themselves in the process of its articulation. It is in light particularly of the latter that we should understand the particular character which Levinas gives to messianism.

We have arrived at the third thesis of our study: the correlation between Judaism and Philosophy does not take place across messianism, but across a dynamic of sanctification which in Levinas is determined by the 'fencing out' of the inhuman from the human, of the 'fencing off' of the human or the project of creating a 'place of refuge' for the human. Messianism in Levinas is structured according to this dynamic. In what way does messianism

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<sup>170</sup> Newton, Fence and Neighbour p82

<sup>171</sup> Caputo, *J Against Ethics: Contributions to a Poetics of Obligation with Constant Reference to Deconstruction* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1993) p125



in Levinas, or the dynamic of salvation, find itself structured according to this dynamic? To answer this question we need to understand the obstacles faced by the dynamic of sanctification of the human. Running alongside and implicated with the movement towards the sanctification of the human in Levinas' work is the awareness of the multifaceted threat to any possible humanism. Levinas of course experienced this threat in a particularly immediate biographical sense. The Second World War affected Levinas in a particularly personal and catastrophic way and Levinas' work can to a large extent be regarded as a response to the 'total dehumanization' witnessed and undergone during the war.<sup>172</sup> This threat also manifests itself diversely at a theoretical level. There is of course Althusser's 'theoretical anti-humanism' representative of the structuralist attitude, with its analytical dissolving of subjectivity, what was to be the irreducible foundation of humanism, or with its decoding or recoding of humanity via the various systems of formalistic codification proposed by the resurgent social sciences. Levinas for his own part interprets the structuralist movement as something of a reflex reaction against the 'fiasco of the human' unfolding in history. In a later work, he considers whether any concept of man previously formulated could withstand the human failure, the failure of humanity as such, of the twentieth century. The result of the impossibility even of any model of humanity able to come to terms with the failure of humanity as such itself takes on a theoretical character, by which is intended already some of the principal features of postmodernism:

But the human deficiency takes in our time a new signification by virtue of the consciousness which we have of this deficiency. It is lived as an ambiguity: despair and frivolity. The exaltation of the human in his courage and in his heroism – in his identity of pure activity – reverses into consciousness of failure, but also of game. Game of influences and drives. Game played without players, without stakes, game without subject . . . There would be no more acts, because there would be no more subject or activities; there would be nothing more than the caprices of the epiphenomenal already other than themselves. (DQVI85)

Mid to late twentieth century thought represents in his eyes a celebration of a certain inhumanity, in its apparent 'frivolity', in its celebration of a 'game without players', or alternatively an abdication before or resignation in face of the real historical inhumanity of the century.

Structuralism for Levinas is in addition often conflated with other movements he regards as spelling the end of any humanism worthy of the name. in the first place, it appears to

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<sup>172</sup> Robbins (ed) Interviews pp180/88

represent for Levinas more or less the continuation of certain schools of thought already well established, namely those of the ‘masters of suspicion’, Marx, Freud and Nietzsche. Levinas has in his sights in particular ideology critique: ‘Ideology usurps the appearances of science, but the announcement of its concept ruins the credit of morality. The suspicion of ideology deals to morality the hardest blow it has ever received. It most likely marks the end of a humanistic ethics (une éthique des hommes) and, in any case, effects an upheaval of the theory of duties and values.’ (DQVI17) Structuralism is also equated by Levinas with what represents for him another principal source of contemporary anti-humanism, namely that of Heidegger. Levinas objects namely to Heidegger’s own recasting of humanism as founded not on the value of humanity as such and as an end in itself but insofar as man acts as the ‘Shepherd of Being’. He objects namely to the fashion in which humanity in Heidegger assumes its dignity only by virtue of its *function* in keeping watch over the ‘clearing of Being.’ He follows the manner in which humanity is accordingly absorbed by Heidegger into the overarching movement of Being and just as for structuralism humanity ‘would only be a detour taken by the structures in order to assemble themselves into a system and show themselves to the light (se montrer à la lumière)’, so for Heidegger humanity becomes only the detour which being takes in order to come to an understanding of itself. (HAH97)

The threat of anti-humanism thus for Levinas manifests itself on several fronts: biographical, historical and theoretical. These are the obstacles which Levinas’ strategy of the sanctification of the human must confront, and indeed which to a large extent provide the very exigency for this strategy. In one of his mature considerations of humanism, Levinas describes the need to breathe new life into what he calls an ‘outmoded’ humanist vocabulary in the face of these threats.<sup>173</sup> (HAH112) Levinas does not hesitate to use the word humanism, details Wright, despite the fact that it is ‘a word that particularly the contemporary French context sounds laughably old-fashioned’.<sup>174</sup>

It is perhaps a certain proximity to his contemporaries, however, that should be emphasized. It is worth examining more closely here one of the sources through which ‘anti-humanism’ enters the vocabulary of contemporary thought. There is namely a certain ambiguity to this ‘anti-humanism’ which can be too quickly overlooked. Althusser’s position, for example, as detailed in *For Marx* is that after the *German Ideology*, Marx’s position represents that of a ‘theoretical anti-humanism’ in contradistinction to the Feuerbachian informed philosophical anthropology of the likes of the *Paris Manuscripts* then in fashion. All

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<sup>173</sup> He writes namely of the need to breathe new life into an ‘outmoded, idealistic and humanistic vocabulary.’

<sup>174</sup> Wright, *Twilight of Jewish Philosophy* p35

humanism, Althusser traces, became for Marx from this moment on an ‘appearance’: the rendering fundamental of what is epiphenomenal, or the casting of the notion of man as an ahistorical, essentialist anthropology.<sup>175</sup> As such, argues Althusser, the continuing recourse to humanism as a normative standard in Marxist circles of his time betrays a certain deficiency, betrays the fact that a proper Marxist discourse has yet to be constructed. *Nonetheless*, Althusser argues, whilst humanism may be an ideology, a mere ‘appearance’ it remains a ‘necessary appearance’, and serves a necessary ‘practico-social function’.<sup>176</sup> Althusser appeals furthermore to a ‘real humanism’ which is *to come*, which remains to be constructed, after the present concept of ‘man’ has been finally dispensed with.<sup>177</sup> Yet what is this new concept of humanism? It does not *yet* exist. The ideology of ‘humanism’ must remain, even though it no longer has any content:

The practical concept that pointed out for us the destination of the displacement has been consumed in the displacement itself, the concept that pointed out for us the site for investigation is from now on absent from the investigation.<sup>178</sup>

The ideology ‘humanism’ is stripped of all content and is transformed into the site of an absence. The fact that ‘humanism’ can no longer be held to be a fully functional concept does not prevent it, that is, from becoming something of a *fetish*. The concept of humanism according to Althusser does still have some content. It has become ‘displaced’ from its conventional moorings and this dynamic of ‘displacement’ has as such becomes its content. It retains content, that is, insofar as it signifies as a ‘*beyond*’:

The gesture towards a beyond, a reality which is still beyond, which is not yet truly realised, but only hoped for, the programme of an aspiration to be brought to life.<sup>179</sup>

Althusser thus traces the gradual erosion of humanism which, however, lives on after its death in the form of a fetish somewhere between presence and absence. ‘Man’ becomes an empty site which is nonetheless to absorb the life channelled towards it, which is to become the site of plenitudes and potentialities which cannot as yet even be formulated.

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<sup>175</sup> Althusser, L *For Marx* (London, Allen Lane, 1969) p223

<sup>176</sup> Ibid p229

<sup>177</sup> Ibid p242/3 specifically he writes that there is a necessity for a getting rid of the concept of man and seeing ‘real, concrete’ man via ‘knowledge of ensemble of social relations’.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid p241

<sup>179</sup> Ibid 245

It is our contention that one of the principle obstacles which Levinas' dynamic of sanctification has to negotiate is this fetish character of the human: indeed, the particular character of Levinas' dynamic of sanctification is determined by this fetish character; the dynamic of the *sanctification* of the human is at the same time the dynamic of the *fetishisation* of the human. The dynamic of the *setting apart* of the human is inextricably bound with the dynamic of the *fetishisation* of the human, the rendering of humanism as a *beyond* in the face of the exhaustion of its concept. It serves in its own particular way to *incubate* or keep warm this concept following its exhaustion.

We in no way intend this as some kind of materialist critique of Levinas. We simply want to highlight the difficulty of the task which Levinas sets himself: the difficulties for the dynamic of sanctification of negotiating the status of human as fetish; the difficulties for the dynamic of fetishisation which as such *calls upon* the dynamic of sanctification in order to articulate itself. We should note the attempt in recent anthropological theory to re-appraise the concept of fetishism particular insofar as concerns its functioning in western society: to direct consideration of the latter beyond the strategy of defetishization or the peeling off of the illusory layers of experience from which the fetish lives.<sup>180</sup> Here is not the place to engage with the complexities of this theory. We will take note only of Taussig, who explores the possibility of 'the face' as a fetish, indeed as something of the 'ur'-fetish insofar as it patrols society's primordial border-crossing and zero-point of sociality: the crossing between revealed and secret. Inspired as much by Deleuze and Guattari as by Levinas, the face as fetish becomes the social machinery across whose physiognomic circuitry is generated the magnetic field of interiority as 'manufactured absence' or as a 'profaned secret' whose very function is precisely to be profaned.<sup>181</sup> Could messianic expectation in Levinas be implicated in the 'gone for lunch, come back later' strategy which defines the fetish of humanism in Althusser? In the relation with this 'manufactured absence' or 'beyond' implicated in both Althusser's fetish of the human and Taussig's fetish of the face there can be glimpsed already the sense in which the appeal to 'messianism' or to a dynamic of salvation might necessarily constitute part of the *economy* of sanctification.

Beyond Marx, it is perhaps Freud who best frames the dynamic of fetishisation we intend here: 'It seems . . . that when the fetish comes to life, so to speak, some process has suddenly

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<sup>180</sup>Spyers, P 'Preface' in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* ed. by Spyers, P (London, Routledge, 1998) p10 'Rather than divesting the *objets chargés* of diverse historical moments and circumstances of their powers, this volume argues for the inclusion of material things – whether as fetishes or, more loosely, fetishes after a fashion, within the wider calculus of human sufferings and joys.'

<sup>181</sup> Taussig, M 'Crossing the Face' in *Border Fetishisms: Material Objects in Unstable Spaces* ed. by Spyers, P (London, Routledge, 1998) pp224-244 (p224)

been interrupted.<sup>182</sup> The fetish comes to life: that is, it becomes an entity, or it is endowed with a force which is not its own, yet which *becomes its own*. The force and life which the fetish assumes is that of a process which has ‘suddenly been interrupted’. How does this fit Levinas’ understanding of humanism? Levinas’ vision of humanism receives its most concise expression is that of the *Humanisme De L’Autre Homme*, in which he articulates what appears as a decisive subversion of its conventional formulation. If our vision of humanism has since the enlightenment been based on the ideas such as autonomy, freedom, self-identity, the independent use of rationality and the ambition for intellectual maturity set against all tutelage or external imposition, then Levinas’ vision of humanism offers in some significant respects an inversion. Levinas frames this work in term of the following question: ‘Can one not find a meaning (a reversed meaning, yet the sole authentic one here) to liberty itself on the basis of the very passivity of the human?’ (HAH80) Humanism, in an apparently radical reversal, is to be thought from the point of departure of passivity Levinas continues:

At stake here is a new concept of passivity, a passivity more radical than that of the effect in a causal series . . . At stake is a passivity referred to the reverse of being, anterior to the ontological sphere where being is taken as the essence of the natural, referred to the anterior not yet beyond creation, to the metaphysical anteriority . . . pre-original anteriority which one could indeed call religious, if the term did not run the risk of a theology. (HAH80/1)

Humanism is to begin from a radical passivity of the self, radical to the extent of referring beyond causal determinism to the passivity of creation understood in a quasi-theological or metaphysical sense. This passivity is in addition to be sharply distinguished from any passivity before a superior force; it is rather passivity before a force which is however self-justifying: ‘the determiner is the Good, which is not the object of a choice, because it takes hold of the subject before it had the time – which is to say the distance – necessary for the choice.’ (HAH84)

Levinas sets out in more detail some of the aspects of this radical, metaphysical passivity of the self before the Good which is to be the basis for a new humanism. It is the other person namely who is the embodiment of this metaphysical Good before which one is radically passive: ‘Absolute non-freedom could absolutely not show itself. Yet the ‘I’ can be put in

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<sup>182</sup> Freud, S “Fetishism” in *Collected Papers* vol. 5 ed. by Strachey, J (London, Hogarth Press, 1950) p201/2  
Fetishism for Freud amounts to a fixation on the last random object preceding the sudden shock of the realization of the absence of virility on behalf of the mother. Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* has in fact something of a morbid fashion with the ‘virility’ of the human, the absence of which revealed in the backfiring of the Marxist project of dis-alienation, requires a consideration of new foundations for humanism in which the other is fixed upon, fixated perhaps, as this new foundation.

question by the other person in an exceptional way.’ (HAH81) The radical passivity of the ‘I’ before the other comes as close as is possible to the contradiction in terms of absolute unfreedom, in a way which almost strips the latter of its contradictory status. This is by virtue of the ‘accusation’ which the mere presence of the other signifies. The self is radically passive before this accusation, because this accusation strikes the self to the bone: the accusation of the other does not relate to any specific transgression or omission of the self, but to the very fact of its existence or persistence in self. Subjectivity proper is thereby constituted in the ‘traumatism’ of this encounter in which, Levinas relates, the ego becomes ‘obsessed’ by the other, is his ‘hostage’, ‘subjected’ to the other. This is a humanism in which the value ‘humanity’ is not something possessed inalienably by each subject by virtue of their identity as subjects. I am ‘human’ rather ‘in spite of myself’. It is in spite of my sense of self-identity and autonomy, and only by virtue of the accusation which the other directs towards the self for the possession of such an identity, that the humanity of man arises. (HAH90)

Purcell offers the following characterisation of this Levinasian inversion of the conventional humanist schema: ‘what Levinas’ ethically inspired thinking offers is a ‘new humanism’ which is also a ‘biblical humanism’; a new humanism which recognises the religiosity of ethical subjectivity’.<sup>183</sup> Yet to what extent does what we are presented with here in fact represent a ‘new humanism’? It is worth noting that despite the inversion of the humanistic schema from foundation in autonomy to heteronomy, despite the *displacement* of the core of the humanism from self to other, we are left fundamentally with the same value system as before. What is at stake in Levinas is not a critique of the notion of autonomy but in articulating the intelligibility of the liberty of a rational, autonomous and responsible ego on a basis other than itself: autonomy is not to be irreducible and thus self-justifying but is to be invested. We should perhaps thus look at Levinas’ inversion of the humanism of the self into the humanism of the other man, or of a ‘biblical humanism’, more for what it *preserves* than what it subverts. Most conspicuously at work in Levinas is the Kierkegaardian model of subjective identity the centrality of which Levinas wants to preserve at all costs: subjectivity conceived as the dimension of the pure ‘first person’ as such, unique, non-comparable, non-reifiable and non-irreducible to any genre or strictly speaking to any concept or grammatical person – an essentially contradiction according to Derrida. Westphal offers an insightful consideration of Levinas and Kierkegaard, detailing the fashion in which for both Levinas and Kierkegaard, ethics begins in a personal relation with the divine in a manner which exceeds

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<sup>183</sup> Purcell, M *Levinas and Theology* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006) p49

any slavish following of mores or loss of the dimension of particularity before the universal or before any ethical objectivism. On the basis of this Westphal makes the following comment:

The decentring of the subject that occurs in structuralist and poststructuralist semiotics is teleologically suspended in the decentring of the subject that occurs in the ethical relation.<sup>184</sup>

The apparent structuralist ‘decentring’ is, in other words sublimated by Levinas via a model of subjectivity which has been in parallel fashion decentred, which has been humbled in its relation with the other, and yet which via this relation finds that it nonetheless retains its central role. In this respect, the degree of separation in Howell’s similar reading of Levinas in the context of his relation with Kierkegaard is illuminating. Noting that where for Kierkegaard it is the resistance of the ‘I’ against the impersonal universal which is central, for Levinas it is first and foremost the resistance of the other, a resistance which only then draws the self out from such assimilation, Howell nonetheless adds:

Levinas will claim against Kierkegaard that it is the Other and not the I who is inassimilable to the System, but his conception is nonetheless Kierkegaardian in so far as it is subjectivity which escapes the totality of history, interiority which cannot be reduced to a concept, consciousness which introduces discontinuity into the whole.<sup>185</sup>

In light of Howell’s appraisal, that is, the appropriation of the Kierkegaardian perspective in Levinas appears in a less radical light. In the wake of the structuralist ‘*decentring*’ of humanism *as such* stands Levinas’ *displacement* of the *core* of the human, its font of intelligibility, from self to other in which, however, all the fundamentals of this humanism remain intact. There is of course novelty to this process, although a thoroughly ambiguous novelty.

The question of ‘passivity’ in Levinas, that is, is merely the symptom for this underlying dynamic of *displacement*, in which a new displaced core of humanity, the other, takes on life following the *interruption* of the old, the self: a new core which lives from and *makes its own* the life of the old. It is worth noting that, aside from any possible biblical inspiration to this humanism based on heteronomy, the gesture of *displacing* the source of humanity from self to other appears as an entirely natural gesture for a humanism at the point of exhaustion; or

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<sup>184</sup> Westphal, *Levinas and Kierkegaard in Dialogue* (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2008) p49

<sup>185</sup> Howells, C ‘Sartre and Levinas’ in *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other* ed. by (London, Routledge, 2000) pp91- 99 (p95)

alternatively at the point of transition from concept to fetish. Levinas work is of course defined by the phenomenological task taken up by the likes of Scheler, Shultz, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Strasser and Waldenfels of coming to terms with Husserl's failure to fully account for the intersubjective dimension, a problem given importance by the fact that Husserl himself declared that phenomenology stands or falls with the possibility of resolving the question of intersubjectivity. Yet, putting this to one side, the humanistic values which Levinas wishes to preserve would by virtue of all that we have here recounted require anchoring to a basis other than that of the self. In this respect indeed the phenomenological problem of intersubjectivity constitutes something of an opportunity: the difficulties which phenomenology has with articulating the relation with the other amount to the fact that this other already constitutes something of a second centre rivalling that of the self, a centre upon which for Levinas humanism is made to fall back. However, that this second centre, the comet within the circuit of the self which the other represents, should necessarily become the plenipotentiary or font of *humanistic* values, *investing* the self with what previously were considered to be its inalienable possessions, is due entirely to the particular vision and efforts of Levinas. The other represents for Levinas as for Sartre the reversion of the intentional flow, in which "being-seen-by-the-other" is the truth of "seeing-the-Other".<sup>186</sup> Interesting here is the position of Howells for whom Levinas' depiction of the other is in its fundamentals basically Sartrean: 'it is in their evaluations rather than their descriptions of relations with the other that Sartre and Levinas come into conflict.'<sup>187</sup> That is, Levinas's account has little, perhaps nothing, with which to defend itself against the Sartrean inversion in which the existence of the other, rather than re-investing in me what previously belonged to me, becomes the 'permanent possibility' of the 'alienation of my being'.<sup>188</sup> In addition, the displacement of the core of humanism is only one possible means of negotiating the fetish character of the human as envisaged by Althusser. Althusser's own strategy is one in which all past content attached to this word would have to be *abandoned* in expectation of this future rebirth. In guiding humanism down the passage from concept to fetish, however, Levinas wishes to leave nothing behind. There is to be no seven days of primeval silence for Levinas.

Thus our fourth thesis: the particular fashion in which the dynamic of the sanctification of the human structures and calls on messianic discourse in Levinas is determined by the fact that this dynamic is implicated with the dynamic of the fetishisation of the human; the

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<sup>186</sup> Sartre, JP *Being and Nothingness* (London, Routledge, 2000) p281

<sup>187</sup> Howells, Sartre and Levinas p91

<sup>188</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* p320



dynamic of *setting apart* is infused with the dynamic of *displacement*. It is this implication, we argue, which necessitates the appeal to messianism. Levinas' work is orientated by the search for, as Levinas tell us, 'the humanity of the human'. In this phrase's enigmatic doubling up of the human is embodied both the setting apart and displacement of the core of the human. This phrase also suggests to us their problematic character. The 'fencing off' of the human from the human we referred to above is especially the fencing off of the human from the inhuman *in* the human. Thus what subsequently is to be the relation between the 'humanity' of the human which is to be set apart and the human all too human tainted with the inhuman? With the progressive heightening of the sanctification/fetishisation of the human, the setting apart and displacement of its core from self to other, the problem of the separation between the humanity of the human and the human becomes, that is, all the more acute. It is in relation to this problematic that messianism takes on its particularly Levinasian character. It functions as something of a *feedback mechanism*. Alternatively put, *messianism in Levinas is the conversation which humanism has with its displaced core*. It is in being structured as such that messianism in Levinas, we argue, amounts to the *parody* of messianism. It is worth noting already, however, that this parody of messianism is in fact a temporary measure in the evolution of Levinas' oeuvre. In anticipation, we can link our second with our fourth thesis to form a final thesis: the trajectory of the disappearance of messianism in Levinas' work is linked to the heightening of the dynamic of sanctification. With the progressive heightening of the dynamic of sanctification, of the separation of the humanity of the human from the human, messianism is replaced by another discourse, the character of which we shall determine.

### Conclusion

Under the model of what we call the parody of messianism in Levinas, we have presented five principal theses. Firstly, we are not dealing in Levinas' work with one messianism but with several messianisms. Secondly, that which unites these diverse eschatological models is not the trajectory of culmination towards the model of the messianic consciousness of the self as presented in *Otherwise than Being*, a model of which all others would be but the incipient expression, but rather of the trajectory of the disappearance of messianism. This trajectory of disappearance is to be explained by the motivating force driving the evolution of Levinas' work: the correlation between Judaism and philosophy cannot, thirdly, be rendered as any essentialized model but represents rather an idiosyncratic process whereby the 'Halakhah'

dimension of sanctification via integration into a divinely ordained eternal order is transformed into an 'Aggadic' dynamic of sanctification of the human which is determinative for both Levinas' 'Jewish' and 'philosophical' writings. What is important in Levinas' correlation, that is, is not which is correlated but that across which this correlation takes place. That across which this correlation takes place is this dynamic of sanctification which must garb itself in a dynamic of salvation. The fashion specific to Levinas in which the dynamic of sanctification calls upon a dynamic of salvation is, fourthly, ordered by the dynamic of the fetishisation of a humanism, the articulation of a humanism on the point of exhaustion, with which this dynamic of sanctification is infused and by which it is determined. The only means available to Levinas to articulate humanism on the point of the exhaustion of its concept is apparently through the sanctifying of the human. Messianism is called upon to negotiate the difficulties which arise from the communicating with a displaced core which this sanctification implies. With the progressive heightening of the dynamic of sanctification/fetishisation however, fifthly, a discourse other than that of messianism is ultimately called upon. Here is our position presented in its generality; we will now observe it at work in detail in each stage of its evolution.

### CHAPTER 3: MESSIANISM AND STRAIGHTFORWARDNESS

#### Introduction

The fate of messianism in Levinas is tied to that of humanism: messianism is ordered in its character according to another dynamic, that namely of the sanctification of the human. The character which messianism takes on in Levinas is determined by the difficulties which occur in the accomplishment of this process of sanctification, the difficulties associated with the negotiation of the fetish character of the human. Alternatively, it is this fetish character, a concept emptied of content, an empty construction site, which requires the dynamic of sanctification for its articulation. One with the setting apart of the human in its sanctification is the displacement of its core; messianism in Levinas is the conversation which humanism has with its displaced core. This we suggested will prove itself, in similar terms to Rosenzweig, to be inscribed in the dynamic which we have defined as the *parody* of messianism.

There is not one messianism in Levinas, it was argued, but at least three messianisms. In this chapter, we shall explore in more detail the transition from the messianism of Levinas' early to middle period. In the previous chapter, we engaged with the correlation thesis insofar as it impinges on the dominant understanding of messianism in Levinas. In the present chapter, we will engage with a closely related thesis, that of the understanding of Levinas as a theorizer of ethics for the postmodern age. We aim to go beyond this thesis in order to gain a deeper understanding of the role of messianism in Levinas' work beyond such a paradigm. We will do this by identifying a certain parallel between Levinas' phenomenological writings and Talmudic commentaries. In the former we will trace the evolution from *Time and the Other* to *Totality and Infinity* of Levinas' articulation of the messianic dimension of his work. In so doing we will appeal to Levinas' discussion of certain messianic thematics from the Talmudic commentaries contained in *Difficult Freedom*, the collection of 'Jewish writings' running more or less parallel in Levinas' intellectual career to *Totality and Infinity*, in which this evolution is expressed with greater clarity. Messianism in *Totality and Infinity* is characterized above all by the implicit and rather ingenuous translation of a certain messianic figure from the rabbinic tradition. We are following, that is, two separate trajectories at the point at which they meet: on the one hand, there is the evolution from Levinas early to middle period; on the other, there is this dynamic of translation of which the correlation between *Difficult Freedom* and *Totality and Infinity* is symptomatic. Observing the meeting point of

these trajectories in *Totality and Infinity* will allow us to identify the value, beyond that attributed to the ‘postmodern’ Levinas, which orientates messianism in this text.

### Messianism and Postmodernism

We have considered various appraisals of the messianic dimension of Levinas’ thought and have noted that they are guided to a large extent by a certain consensus that Levinas’ appeal to this dimension is informed by a correlation between ‘Judaism’ and ‘Philosophy’. The correlation thesis in fact is based upon another premise, one which strongly informs Plüss’ work on messianism in Levinas. For Plüss, to recall, Levinas’ philosophy is determined by an imperative through which it is drawn into proximity with ‘Judaism’. ‘Judaism’ is not here the historical religion or body of thought; rather this historical religion or body of thought is a *cipher*, ‘Judaism’ is not itself fundamentally an ‘other thought’, another textual tradition or way of thinking or way of life etc; it is rather ‘the other to thought’. ‘Judaism’ is most primordially the cipher for an ‘event’, an event which ‘happens’ to thought: ‘Judaism, as I see it, is the event, which Levinas brings to our attention.’ This event, to recall, is precisely the messianic event. It is, Plüss informs us, the event of radical particularity or difference as the disturbance of consciousness which both awakens and inspires philosophy whilst depriving it of any claims to all-powerful or totalizing comprehension: ‘Judaism happens (ereignet sich), futurally (zukünftig) and as unforeseeable. It befalls (zustösst) thought as it were. It is the disturbance of thought - and not its discovery.’<sup>189</sup> The ‘event’ of Judaism is the ‘unforeseeable’ and ‘enigmatic’ advent of radical particularity and difference, a particularity and difference which the other person embodies. The messianic ‘event’ of the other person, the particular par excellence, pits a singular experience, experience par excellence, against rationality which cannot neutralize or integrate it. It is ‘apocalyptic’ and yet also contains within it a ‘futural’ character, an awakening of desire for that which exceeds comprehension or the grasp of consciousness in any sense of the word. Plüss’ notion of the correlation or ‘inspiration’ of philosophy by Judaism is grounded, that is, by a certain re-evaluation of the relation of universal and particular. The correlation thesis can thus be mapped onto a larger thesis: the thesis of Levinas as a postmodern philosopher, the principal contribution of whom is the recalibrating of ethics and religion for the postmodern age. Messianism as such

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<sup>189</sup> Plüss, *Das Messianische* p103

becomes the event in which the postmodern privileging of particularity and difference receives its authentication.

There are three principal aspects to the postmodern interpretation of Levinas. It is Kosky's work on Levinas' philosophy of religion which brings out the first of these. Levinas, argues Kosky, 'causes us to question the common perception of postmodern thought as irreligious and immoral, unconcerned about God and about the neighbour.'<sup>190</sup> Levinas work is postmodern, according to Kosky, in the sense of articulating a 'post-metaphysical' notion of transcendence, a notion of transcendence in the wake of the 'death of God.' Levinas' work is one which is fully conscious, that is, of the various pitfalls of what comes under the notion of onto-theology. It cultivates a relation with transcendence awake to all the consequences of Nietzsche's critique of the imagining of a transcendent 'world behind the scenes', one which drains the world which presents itself to us of all meaning. It is a cultivation which is also fully aware of Heidegger's interdiction of the forgetting of ontological difference: of the conceiving Being as God considered onto-theologically, as *causa sui* or as a merely privileged being, the first link in the causal chain of creation. Indeed Levinas' work, argues Kosky, exploits the philosophical occasion of the 'death of God' to purify transcendence of the restraints which metaphysics, so conceived as onto-theological, imposes upon it. As such it produces a new vision of transcendence liberated from the shackles of ontology conventionally understood. Such a notion of transcendence is one which takes its point of departure from ethics, not in the Kantian sense, Kosky stresses, of separating out a series of philosophically intelligible moral imperatives from religion and subsequently leaving the dimension of transcendence to blind faith.<sup>191</sup> It rather articulates in a philosophical intelligible fashion the dimension of transcendence *as* the ethical dimension. Transcendence is articulated namely via the phenomenology of 'responsibility': the horizon of transcendence opens in the exploration of the transcendental underside of subjectivity, or the point of extreme passivity at which subjectivity, *interiority*, is affected by that which is exterior to it, an *exteriority* indeterminable in itself except for the fact of the response it provokes in subjectivity. Levinas' philosophy is postmodern insofar as, in place of a notion of an onto-theological transcendence as a 'world behind the scenes', Levinas offers a post-metaphysical notion of transcendence as exteriority, a notion of God after the 'death of God' in which God enters consciousness under the condition of anonymity.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion* xiv

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid* p149

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid* p192

Schroeder's work is most representative of the second aspect under which Levinas is most often considered as 'postmodern' philosopher, the aspect namely of the critique of totality broadly conceived as 'totality'. The aim of Levinas' work is for Schroeder 'the metaphysical privileging of multiplicity over unity, difference (infinity) over sameness (totality).'<sup>193</sup> This pits Levinas against Hegel, whose philosophy is rather characterised by the circular movement of totality whereby absolute subjectivity realises its self-identity across history through suppressing otherness and subsuming it into itself. Levinas critiques specifically a certain conceptual violence at work in this movement, in which totality is accomplished via the work of negation, starting from the negation of one particular self by another and culminating in the self-negation of particularity as such insofar as it finds its fulfilment in the homogenous citizenship of the universal State. Levinas criticises this conceptual violence, argues Schroeder, insofar as it is the conceptual root of the violence which has manifested itself in recent history: 'the (logically) inevitable outcome of the political agenda of idealism, which reduces all ethics to politics, is not only the centralization of government and, possibly, of the reserves of capital (Europe today bears witness to this event); it is also the levelling of the diversity of cultures and languages. In short it negates the very aspects of human existence that make it interesting. Ontological order, in its assertion that it is the cosmic and worldly order, denies difference its full measure. In so doing, and in realizing itself politically and socially (and can the two terms be thought separately anymore?), it leads to war and eventually to nihilism.'<sup>194</sup> In face of this, Levinas' work is guided rather by the need to preserve difference and plurality. Rather than subsuming alterity, particularity and diversity, it seeks to attribute to these the highest possible value; 'Separation, which is difference itself, is "better" than unity claims Levinas', Schroeder tells us, 'the respect for and maintenance of plurality constitutes the essence of the ethical relation.'<sup>195</sup>

A third aspect of the postmodern character of Levinas work is the fashion in which, as it seeks to articulate a notion of transcendence fully aware of the critique of onto-theology, so it seeks to articulate an inviolable ethical imperative in face of the critique of ideology and postmodern suspicion of all universal moral codes. Westphal, for example sees Levinas as responding to the postmodern problem of how to ground ethical behaviour after critique of metaphysics and of any notion of an arche – the onto-theological God or absolute subjectivity for example - on the basis of which universal values can be formulated.<sup>196</sup> For Cariamelli,

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<sup>193</sup> Schroeder, B *Altared Ground: Levinas, History and Violence* (New York, Routledge, 1996) p43

<sup>194</sup> Ibid p78

<sup>195</sup> Ibid

<sup>196</sup> Westphal, Levinas and Kierkegaard, p45

Levinas' ethics escapes all contemporary critique of morality insofar as it is orientated towards the ethical imperative which the other person embodies in the immediacy of his presence, and imperative which as such cannot be neutralized and formalized into a code. Levinas' ethics is an ethics always only of the first person: 'I' can only identify that which is *my* responsibility and not that of the other who precisely invests this responsibility. As such, Cariamelli argues, Levinas' work ties in with 'contemporary anti-humanism' and the suspicion of any attempt at positing and enforcing universal values whilst avoiding the apparent ethical nihilism towards which these contemporary tendencies apparently inevitably lead.<sup>197</sup> Likewise for Docherty, Levinas articulates a postmodern notion of justice, insofar as he is orientated towards justice as event, as always unique and single instant: there can no longer be any totalising form of justice or politics attempting to arrest becoming into being; we must always face anew the other in his particularity and heterogeneity.<sup>198</sup>

What all of these postmodern interpretations of Levinas share is an envisaging of Levinas' work as fundamentally an exaltation of difference, of alterity and of exteriority as values in themselves. As such, messianism in Levinas' work becomes essentially one among several means of expressing the alterity of the other as an otherness not relative to the 'same', but as pure otherness imposing itself upon the 'same': on Husserl's transcendental ego, Hegel's universal Spirit or, more controversially, Heidegger's Being.<sup>199</sup> All such interpretations are heavily influenced by Derrida's earliest critique of Levinas' work in 'Violence and Metaphysics', in which Levinas' eschatology is interpreted as 'the dream of a purely *heterological* thought at its source. A pure thought of a pure difference.'<sup>200</sup> Messianism in Levinas is interpreted as the impossible dream of a thought of pure difference, a difference freed of the constraints of a language which could only express it in relative terms and thus neutralise it. The Derridean interpretation of Levinas' work as the attempt to think and express the 'unthinkable, impossible, unutterable' which difference as such represents has produced many variations. May's critique of Levinas, for example, revolves around the argument that no mere experience, be it that of the experience par excellence of 'absolute difference', can be the basis for the articulation of ethical obligation in itself. No experience

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<sup>197</sup> 'Cariamelli, Transcendence et Ethique p214/5 'The humanism of the Other is suspicious towards the historical production of values, and could be read as a negative critique of all "historical" ethics.'

<sup>198</sup> Docherty, T 'Postmodernism: an Introduction' in *Postmodernism: A Reader* ed. by Docherty, T, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp6-29 (p26)

<sup>199</sup> Kosky, op cit and Derrida, J 'Violence and Metaphysics' in *Writing and Difference* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978) pp97-192 are among those who challenge Levinas on the inherent 'violence' of Heidegger's thought with regards to the suppression of alterity, arguing that Levinas in many respects is following the path which Heidegger himself laid out.

<sup>200</sup> Derrida, Violence and Metaphysics p38

can express obligation without reference, that is, to discursive practice which would rationalise this experience in terms of moral obligation and yet as such inevitably extract from its quality as experience and thus as absolute difference. For May this inevitability betrays itself in Levinas' work by virtue of the fact that, whilst being presented as the condition of possibility for morality in general, the face to face relation with the other does not appear to guide towards any specific obligations: 'if the ethical experience does not ground any specific obligation, how would it ground ethics at all? To appeal to an experience that is divorced from the judgements which ethics makes and install it as the ground of ethics is to posit an experience that plays no normative role in ethical considerations.'<sup>201</sup> In not recognising this, Levinas condemns his ethics to meaninglessness.<sup>202</sup>

We of course do not deny this postmodern aspect to Levinas' work. The interpretation that Levinas, insofar as the *metaphysical* logic of his work is concerned, considers difference as an ethical value in itself is irresistible: no-one could deny the centrality of Levinas' critique of a philosophical tradition 'in which the same dominates the other'.<sup>203</sup> *Totality and Infinity* after all is framed as the search for 'the alterity, the radical heterogeneity of the other'. (TI36) Much of *Totality and Infinity* is devoted to the description of the self-enclosed and solipstic economy of the self, whose subsequent interpolation by the other, by virtue simply of its otherness, is made to seem all the more dramatic. This opens ultimately onto a metaphysical vision of the discontinuity and heterogeneity structural to being: where 'in existing itself there is a multiplicity and a transcendence'. (TI277) We are of the opinion, however, that an understanding of the specifically *messianic* logic of the relation with the other requires that we go beyond an understanding of the 'postmodern' relation as the relation with pure 'difference'. Indeed, whilst Levinas' invocation of the 'eschatological' relation of peace in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* undoubtedly contains an element of this relation, a full understanding of messianism in Levinas requires that we indeed see messianism as to some extent in tension with the metaphysical logic which informs it.

### Messianic Figures a) From *Time and the Other* to *Totality and Infinity*

Whilst there is certainly justification for the postmodern reading, we must not rest with this aspect. Other concerns betray themselves in the pursuit of Levinas' phenomenology.

<sup>201</sup> May, T *Reconsidering Difference: Nancy, Derrida, Levinas and Deleuze* (University Park, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) p143

<sup>202</sup> Ibid p149 'the ethical experience which he describes is like a cog in the machine that performs no function.'

<sup>203</sup> From the essay 'Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity' (CP53)



These are betrayed first of all in the transition we observed in Levinas' figuration of the Messianic from earlier works such as *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents* towards *Totality and Infinity*. Both figures are to be exemplars of this 'radical heterogeneity'. Any consideration of messianism in Levinas would have to take account, therefore, beyond the simply exalting of difference or exteriority as such which these figures embody, of this transition from one figure to the next and the reasons for it. Given that there is more than one messianic figure of exteriority in Levinas' work, or more specifically that there is a marginalising of one figure in favour of the other, we must not simply stop at the question of difference, alterity etc but must ask the question: what kind of difference and why the prioritising of one over another?

The eschatological relation in Levinas' earlier works, we noted, is connected principally to the figure of the feminine. 'Does a situation exist where the alterity of the other appears in its purity?' asks Levinas in *Time and the Other*. 'What is the alterity that does not purely and simply enter into the opposition between two species of the same genus? I think the absolutely contrary whose contrariety is in no way affected by the relationship that can be established between it and its correlative, the contrariety that permits its terms to remain absolutely other, is the *feminine*.' (TO85) Why should the feminine as phenomenological category be the privileged expression of the alterity of the other person, be this person male or female? It is because sexual difference, Levinas argues, presents an exceptional form of difference. 'It is situated beside the logical division into genera and species.' (TO85) It is not a difference, namely which can be united under a greater and more formal unity; it is rather a difference which carves reality itself into the form of difference, an 'insurmountable duality', a reality for which there is henceforth no 'pre-existing whole'. (TO 86) The alterity of the feminine is not merely one characteristic of the feminine among others, nor 'other' in the merely private and relative sense of 'different'. Alterity is the most essentially characteristic of the feminine, a positive characteristic: the site 'where alterity would be borne by a being in a positive sense, as essence.' (TO85) As such, the feminine as metaphor for alterity serves as the means for sharply distinguishing the alterity of the other presented by Levinas from the model of alterity offered by Hegel and by Sartre. The other is not to represent primordially another 'freedom', mirror image of myself possessing the same qualities, 'for with a freedom there can be no other relationship than that of submission or enslavement.' (TO87) The feminine other is alterity as such: not another 'me' to which I can bear only an antagonistic relation, but a more radical alterity which only the 'mystery' of death comes close to expressing.

From the alterity of the other understood as structurally feminine, a set of principal characteristics ensue. The first of these is voluptuousness: the other is one who ‘withdraws into mystery’. (TO 86) Another is modesty: the feminine is that which by essence ‘consists in slipping away from the light’. (TO 87) Alternatively, ‘hiding is the way of existing of the feminine’. (TO 87) The manner par excellence of relating to the feminine is as such that of the ‘caress’, a mode of relation which goes beyond all question of knowledge: ‘what is caressed is not touched, properly speaking. It is not the softness or warmth of the hand given in contact that the caress seeks. The seeking of the caress constitutes its essence by the fact that the caress does not know what it seeks. This “not knowing”, this fundamental disorder, is the essential.’ (TO89) The caress represents a relation with ‘mystery’ in its most pure form: radical mystery in which the searching is one with the object searched, the question one with the answer. In relating to the other as the horizon of a withdrawing mystery, the relation with the other is the relation with an absence which is somehow still a *positive* relation: ‘the relation with the other is the absence of the other; not the absence of pure nothingness, but absence in a horizon of the future, an absence that is time.’ (TO90) The relation with the withdrawing mystery of the other is for Levinas the most primordial relation of the ego to the dimension of time: time becomes orientated structurally towards the future in the relation which the ego has with this withdrawing mystery. The other as feminine thus becomes a form of messianism structural to our experience of the world. In particular it is a messianism structural to our experience of time as a time orientated towards the horizon of the future opened by the pure, structural ‘mystery’ or ‘surprise’ which the feminine embodies.

Levinas consolidates this phenomenology of the feminine with a phenomenology of the dimension of ‘fecundity’ which follows from it. From the relation with the mystery of the feminine arises the relation with the son, or the relation of ‘paternity’, which offers likewise a model of relation to alterity par excellence parallel to that of the ‘mystery’ of the feminine. ‘Paternity is the relationship with a stranger who, while being Other, is myself, the relationship of the ego with a myself who is nonetheless a stranger to me.’ (TO91) The other as son approaches the model of alterity as another ‘me’ and yet remains distant from it. ‘I am in some way my son’, yet in such a way that it is not the son who becomes like ‘me’ but ‘I’ who becomes other than ‘myself’, who is taken beyond the hitherto inescapable and fixed boundary of ‘my’ own identity. The son is the archetype for a relation with the other not as enslavement by another desire, as in Hegel, but a relation which opens the possibility of freedom. This is the freedom first of all to exceed and to escape from self-identity. The relation with the son represents an extension and ‘closure’ of the messianic relation with the

feminine insofar as it represents a 'victory over death', likewise death in the sense of enchainment to my own identity. (TO91)

In *Totality and Infinity* this messianism of the feminine remains; it is indeed fleshed out with greater detail. To the dimension of the radical future which the 'voluptuousness' and 'fecundity' of the feminine open are added other characteristics apparently following from these. The feminine comes to represent a paradox, a value oscillating between on the one hand 'exhibitionism' and 'exorbitant ultra-materiality' and on the other 'modesty' and 'virginity'. The feminine becomes the embodiment of the radical future in *Totality and Infinity* insofar as always appearing to 'exhibit' herself and yet nonetheless always withdrawing from this exhibition in 'modesty' back into the dimension of the fundamental mystery from which she comes. (TI256) The messianism of the relation with the feminine is likewise in *Totality and Infinity* followed once more by the eschatological extension which the relation with the son represents. The relation with the son is, as in *Time and the Other*, the dynamic which alongside the relation with the feminine shapes our experience of time: it leads us to experience time 'as the time of the absolutely other', or the relation with time as the relation with the son as that which *escapes* us into the future beyond our time. (TI269) This 'time of the non-definitive' in *Time of the Other* becomes the 'time of infinity' in *Totality and Infinity*: essentially another way of describing the same 'resurrection' of the father in the son. This is not a 'resurrection', to recall, in the sense of the mere renewal of life; the 'resurrection' of the father in the son signifies more primordially the relation of one 'interiority' with another, or of interiority with *itself* in an ecstatic and entirely non-reflexive sense. It is a 'resurrection' of the self in the sense that it allows the self to be other than itself, to escape from its self. The importance of this 'resurrection' in *Totality and Infinity* falls upon the ability it gives to individuals to escape from the meaningless to which the overarching course of history would otherwise consign it. This renewal of interiority or ecstatic relation of one interiority to another across fecundity allows for the pitting of the subjective experience of time against the impersonal, objective time of history: 'The irreplaceable unicity of the I which is maintained against the State is accomplished by fecundity. It is not to purely subjective events, losing themselves in the sands of interiority which the rational reality mocks . . . Fecundity permits the assuming of the actual as the vestibule of a future. It opens the subterranean, where a life called inward or merely subjective seemed to take refuge, upon being. (TI300) The 'messianic' relation with the other as son is the site where the 'actual' becomes the 'vestibule for the future': it opens as such an alternative trajectory of time to that which the dimension of

universal and impersonal history imposes. It allows as such the protest of interiority against the universal to be considered as more than a vain flight from reality.

The messianism of the feminine, and the horizon of fecundity which follows from it, whilst being carried over intact and as to essentials virtually unchanged from Levinas' earlier work, is nonetheless subject to demotion in *Totality and Infinity*. The feminine here finds itself split between, on the one hand, serving as a prolegomenon to the principal articulation of messianic event of alterity in *Totality and Infinity*, and on the other, constituting its aftershock. In the first instance, the feminine carries to the ego in the phenomenological process of its development, the values of 'intimacy', 'secrecy' and 'mystery' without which it could not withdraw and collect itself into the interior of the dwelling and remain at a distance from the immediacy of contact with the elemental. The feminine as such sets the stage for the principal relation with the other: hospitality and welcome will be to shown to the other from the point of departure of the interior of the 'dwelling' of which the feminine is the 'spirit'. In the second instance, the feminine with which we are now familiar in the sense of embodying the dimensions of voluptuousness and fecundity, is now understood as occurring *after* the principal relation with the other. The feminine, Levinas now writes, is a 'plane both presupposing and transcending the epiphany of the Other in the face' (TI253) The relation with the feminine becomes a partial relaxation of the moral rigour imposed upon the self in the relation with the face of the other, a partial backsliding into the dimension of egotistical need from the dimension of moral responsibility which the relation with the other par excellence embodies. It interrupts the metaphysical 'desire' for the other, transforming it back into a form of 'need': 'Love remains a relation with the Other that turns into need, and this need still presupposes the total, transcendent exteriority of the other, of the beloved.' (TI254) Need, to recall, is the drive which negates and absorbs exteriority in contradistinction to desire which is desire for the otherness of the other, a desire which feeds of itself. Eros returns from desire to need, and yet only partially. Sexual need fulfilled in the caress is spiritualized by the metaphysical relation with the other which it is made to presuppose: it does not aim at absorption of the other into the field of its immanence, rather it aims via the caress at what transcends it. Unlike the sinking of teeth into food, the caress aims beyond the merely sensible towards a certain 'nothingness' with which it is brought into contact.

Given the marginalisation of the feminine as expression of the messianic horizon, what then constitutes in *Totality and Infinity* the primary relation with the other? Firstly, the relation par excellence with the other is conceived no longer as the caress, but as the relation across *language*: 'the calling into question of the I, coextensive with the manifestation of the

other in the face, we call language.’ (TI171) The ‘face’, taken phenomenologically, is to be regarded as ‘pure expression’. The other, that is, is not *par excellence* *seen*, that is given to vision as a particular signification within a totality of significations given unity by the needs and goals of the individual ego across the dimension of labour. The other is rather heard, is the *event* of speech, the *upsurge* of language within the silent and self-enclosed world of the ego characterised solely by vision. As such the relation with the other as interlocutor takes on a moral character in a more specific and heightened sense than it does with the relation with the other as feminine across the caress. The other as the modernist self, seeking freedom from enchainment to its identity, a freedom gained through its relation to the feminine, is marginalised in favour of a vision of the self as engaged primordially in naive and solipsistic self-enjoyment: a self ‘sinking its teeth’ into the plenitude of life, without thought of anything beyond this. The appeal of the other calls into question the naive enjoyment of the solipsistic self in its silent world, calling the self to moral responsibility in the same measure that it calls it to language.

Certain archetypal characterisations of the other thus ensue. In place of the ‘voluptuousity’ and ‘fecundity’ of the feminine via the caress, the other is characterised by ‘nudity’ and ‘destitution’. The ‘nudity’ of the other is a metaphor for the character of the face as ‘pure expression’ cutting through whatever signification might try to clothe it. The ‘destitution’ and ‘homeless’ of the other arise from the fact that the other appears within the horizon of the closed economy of the self to which it does not belong, in which it is not at home. Faced with the advent other as such within its world, the self can no longer remain within its closed and solipsistic economy, can no longer remain tied to the ‘naive exercise of its spontaneity.’ This has two consequences. Firstly, the ego begins to question itself, a self-questioning, Levinas argues, which is the birth of critique and philosophy. (TI 195) Secondly, this questioning has as consequence also the reversing of the current of the economy of the self from enjoyment and self-interest to charity: ‘the other, the absolutely other, arrests possessions, which he contests by his epiphany in the face.’ (TI171) All these narrative stages are of course metaphors. ‘Possession’ is a phenomenological cipher for the process of extracting from the flux of the *hyle*, reifying in the form of object possessed within the dwelling and mobilising according to specific needs. ‘Charity’ is a metaphor for discourse considered at a phenomenological level, the point at which transcendental *intuition* appeals to *signification*. Signification, language, is namely formed as the *reverse* of possession. In speech the self ‘gives the world’ to the other: ‘speech first founds community by giving, by presenting the phenomenon as given; and it gives by thematizing.’ (TI98) We should note that these

characteristics are not in themselves messianic: the ‘destitution’ of the other which render the metaphors of ‘orphan, widow, and stranger’ appropriate is a somewhat de-materialized, structural ‘destitution’ and there is no sense in which the messianic age would redeem the other of these characteristics. In his Talmudic commentaries on messianism in *Difficult Freedom*, moreover, Levinas entertains the possibility that poverty and economic inequality would remain in the messianic age precisely to safeguard the continued possibility of ethical behaviour. (DF 92/3)

To these are added a set of characteristics which, for reasons which will become manifest, correspond much more to the specifically messianic character of the other in *Totality and Infinity*. The messianism of the other as interlocutor, as with the messianic of the feminine, takes on the character of a paradox. The other is both the most humble, characterised by the ‘destitution’ of being homeless within the economy of the self, and yet most exalted as the site of the concrete event of the passing of the infinite in the finite. Besides the nudity and destitution of the other within the economy of the self, that is, the other is also characterised as the one who ‘commands’ from a position of ‘Height’ beyond this economy: ‘the dimension of height in which the other is placed is as it were the primary curvature of being from which the privilege of the Other results, the gradient of transcendence.’ (TI86) Being is ‘curved’ towards the dimension of the ‘Height’ of the other, the dimension of transcendence into which the other always appears to be withdrawing. To the ‘height’ of the other is attached another set of closely analogous characteristics. The first of these is the ‘mastery’ of the other: ‘the “communication” of ideas, the reciprocity of the dialogue, already hides the profound essence of language. It resides in the irreversibility of the relation between me and the other, in the Mastery of the Master coinciding with his position as other and as exterior.’ (TI101) Dialogue is not first and foremost characterised by the reciprocal exchange of ideas, where both the self and the other can both correct and be corrected: it is rather more primordially ‘irreversible’ and ‘asymmetrical’. The most primordial layer of the relation with the other is namely the act in which the other as ‘Master’ imposes the dimension of language upon the self. Before the freedom to critique or to question is the obedience to the ‘Master’ who bestows upon us the capacity to reflect and question: ‘My freedom is thus challenged by a Master who can invest it. Truth, the sovereign exercise of freedom, becomes henceforth possible.’ (TI101)

The other as ‘Master’ is different from that of the master-slave dialectic against whose imposed enslavement the self needs to define the realm of its own freedom: the other who commands me commands me to freedom and responsibility. The relation with the other, taken as master who invests us with freedom, is thus most essentially characterised by the quality of

‘teaching’: ‘teaching is a discourse in which the master can bring to the student what the student does not yet know. It does not operate as maieutics, but continues the placing in me of the idea of infinity.’ (TI180) The relation with the other is not a question of ‘maieutics’, the attempt of the master to awaken in the student what the student in a vague sense already knows. The relation with the other is that of teaching par excellence: not the uncovering within the self of that which is buried or cultivating of that which is incipient, but rather the placing in the self by the other not of that which is utterly exterior to it and of which it could have no inkling on its own. ‘Teaching’ in Levinas is in fact less of a metaphor than some other of the ciphers taken by Levinas from the empirical world to describe phenomenological ‘structures’ or ‘events’. The world of the ego is primordially silent. In the expression of the other, in the encounter with the face of the other as pure self-expression, is introduced the dimension of language into the silent world of the ego. The other even at this phenomenological level in a quite literal sense ‘teaches’ the self. How could the self ‘learn’ language, how could it recognise the other as other, if it did not already in some sense know it? Alternatively, how could the self even relate to an other across language, how could the difference for such a relation and for language be recognised, if it were not in some sense enclosed within itself without need of reference to the other and to language? Such irreconcilables do not register on Levinas’ radar, and it is left to Waldenfels to articulate them with the greatest clarity possible.<sup>204</sup>

It is the language of ‘Height’, ‘Mastery’, and ‘Teaching’ which is at the core of Levinas’ theorising of the eschatological dimension in *Totality and infinity*. It is this language which takes over from and marginalises the language of ‘voluptuosity’ and ‘fecundity’ according to which messianism in Levinas’ earlier work is ordered. We will now explore these characteristics in greater detail. Why this transition and what concern does it betray beyond that of the postmodern concern with difference? In fact we need first of all to justify why we regard this qualities as messianic for Levinas, as well as outline the circumstances under which they become messianic. For this appeal to the set of Talmudic commentaries running parallel to *Totality and Infinity* is necessary, in which the messianic qualities of these qualities is rendered explicit.

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<sup>204</sup> See Waldenfels, B ‘Experience of the Alien in Husserl’s Phenomenology’ *Research in Phenomenology* 20 (1990) pp19-33

Messianic Figures (b): *Totality and Infinity* and *Difficult Freedom*

The evolution of the dimension of the messianic in Levinas' work has just been traced. We have arrived at the messianic language of *Totality and Infinity*, and now need to understand what messianic figure this language adumbrates. In approaching this figure, there are two critical trends of the transformation we have just traced which are of interest.

The first of these is what could be called the feminist critique of Levinas. Needless to say that at all the stages of his construction of the feminine, Levinas has been subject to mostly quite justified attack. On the one hand, there is the reaction to *Time and the Other* of de Beauvoir for whom Levinas' messianic construction of the feminine represents simply a rendering explicit of the discourse underlying all philosophy whereby the masculine is constructed as subject and as absolute in face of the feminine marginalised as other.<sup>205</sup> On the other hand, there is Irigary's critique, and the parallel critique of Chalier and Derrida, of *Totality and Infinity* for whom Levinas, in rendering sexual difference secondary in face of a more primordial difference, has marginalised and thus cannot fully take into account the radical character of the dimension of the feminine.<sup>206</sup> Stanford argues against any attempt to mitigate Levinas' account of the feminine of its crassness, attributing its weakness to the Platonic, metaphysical agenda which underlies his phenomenology of the other.<sup>207</sup> According to Stanford, Levinas' work is characterised by the unsustainable effort to separate counter-intuitively a non-erotic, spiritual and principally masculine desire, from an erotic, biological and principally feminine desire.<sup>208</sup> There are other more balanced appraisals of the role of the feminine in Levinas' work. Chanter observes the fashion in which the figure of the feminine in Levinas, whilst undergoing marginalisation, nonetheless remains implicit in and grounds all Levinas' later articulations of the dimension of alterity.<sup>209</sup> Whilst noting the marginalisation of the feminine in Levinas in the passage from *Time and the Other* to *Totality*

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<sup>205</sup> Cited in Chanter, T 'Feminism and the Other, The Provocation of Levinas' in *Rethinking the Other* ed. by Bernasconi, R and Critchley S (London, Routledge, 2000) pp32 – 56 (p36)

<sup>206</sup> Irigary, L 'Questions to Emmanuel Levinas on the Divinity of Love' in *Re-reading Levinas* ed. by Bernasconi, R and Critchley S (London; Athlone Press, 1991) pp109-108; 'Ethics and the Feminine Face' in *Re-reading Levinas* ed. by (London, Athlone Press, 1991) pp119-129 Derrida, *Here I Am* p 42 and also *Adieu* p37

<sup>207</sup> Stanford, S *The Metaphysics of Love: Gender and Transcendence in Levinas* (London, Athlone Press, 2000) Levinas p108

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid* p125

<sup>209</sup> Chanter, T 'Feminism and the Other, The Provocation of Levinas' in *Rethinking the Other* ed. by Bernasconi, R and Critchley S (London, Routledge, 2000) pp32 – 56 and 'The Hands that Give and the Hands that Take: the Politics of the Feminine in the Levinas' in in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* ed by Horowitz, A and Horowitz, G (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006) pp63-77



and *Infinity*, Keyser and Chalier note the re-emergence into primacy of the figure of the feminine in *Otherwise than Being* under the guise of the essentially ‘maternal’ character of subjectivity in this work.<sup>210</sup> This ‘maternity’ allows the relation with the feminine to enter the ethical realm from which it was previously excluded. For Stanford, however, the same metaphysics of Levinas’ earlier work remains in this late work in place.<sup>211</sup>

The second common critique concerns the character of the correlation between the face of the other and the idea of the infinite upon which the messianic character of the relation with the other is based. Lingis questions the success of Levinas’ attempt to articulate this correlation in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>212</sup> Others, such as Derrida, question the premise which underlies it: ‘The face to face then is not originally determined by Levinas as the vis a vis of two equally and upright men. The latter supposes the face to face of the man with bent neck and eyes raised towards the God on high. Language is indeed the possibility of the face to face and of being upright, but it does not exclude inferiority, the humility of the glance at the father.’<sup>213</sup> What Levinas’ articulation of the correlation between the face of the other and the idea of the infinite signifies is that Levinas can express the transcendence of the other, its radical exteriority, only via appeal to a pre-determined theological conceptuality. It is not that Levinas articulates the transcendence of the other and then articulates its analogous character with the transcendence of God. It is only via the analogy with the transcendence of God that the transcendence of the other can be expressed. Similar observations abound in the commentaries on Levinas, less in the form of rigorously developed critiques than as suspicions aired with regards to the incursion of an apparently theological vocabulary into the philosophical sphere. According to Badiou, for example, the ‘other’ can escape the ‘same’ in Levinas only insofar as it partakes of the transcendence of the Other, namely God.<sup>214</sup> Smith, finding Levinas guilty of a certain ‘dogmatism,’ cuts the Gordian knot: ‘however sophisticated a conception of divinity Levinas explicates’, he declares, ‘it is unquestionably some version of God.’<sup>215</sup>

Levinas for his own part articulates the justification for the correlation around which *Totality and Infinity* revolves: the correlation made between the idea of infinity and face of the

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<sup>210</sup> Chalier op cit; Kayser, P *Emmanuel Levinas: La Trace du Féminin* (Paris, Presses Universitaires Paris, 2000)

<sup>211</sup> Stanford, *Metaphysics of Love* p91

<sup>212</sup> In the translators preface to *Totality and Infinity* (TI19) Lingis states the following: ‘the careful reader . . . may find himself doubting whether his experience of the other person is a sufficient ground for the “idea of the infinite”’.

<sup>213</sup> Derrida, *Violence and Metaphysics* p107

<sup>214</sup> Badiou, A *Ethics: An Essay on the Understanding of Evil* (London, Verso, 2001) p27

<sup>215</sup> Smith, N ‘Adorno vs. Levinas: Evaluating Points of Contention’ *Continental Philosophy Review* 40 (2007) pp275–306 (p199)

other is based on the fact that, as the point of origin of language, the latter assumes certain characteristics analogous to those of the latter.<sup>216</sup> The first of these is the aspect of ‘overflowing’ possessed by both the face of the other and the idea of the infinite: ‘the presence of a being entering into, but overflowing, the sphere of the same determines its “status” as infinite.’ (TI 195) As the font of language, all attempts to render the other intelligible within language are doomed to failure: as such, the other withdraws from all intelligibility. The relation with the other is a relation with that which is always in the process of abstracting or absolving itself from all relation. The face of the other is the site of a certain flight or exodus from being. As the infinite exists infinitely separated or in infinite recession from the finite, so the other is always ‘infinitely distant from the relation in which he enters.’ (TI215) As the relation with the infinite is constituted by and as this very dynamic of recession so the relation with the other is precisely the relation with that which abstracts itself, a relation across and *as* this dynamic of abstraction: ‘to be in a relation whilst absolving oneself from this relation is to speak.’ (TI215) More concretely, Levinas states elsewhere, ‘ethical resistance is the presence of infinity.’<sup>217</sup> The fact that a free will recognises its *own* limits, its own finitude, before an other determines the proximity of this other to the infinite. The question which the likes of Derrida pose, however, is why the face of the other should have this privileged position as font of all language, and thus be capable of such ethical resistance, in the first place. The human face of the other can only become the privileged signifier raised definitively above all others, and thus the source from which language flows, once the analogy with the face of God is already made. In other words, the correlation between other and infinite must have already been made in order for the other to take on structural similarity with the infinite.

Our contribution to the first line of critique is limited to an observation with regards to the relation between the two figures of messianism which we have so far observed at work in Levinas. Levinas presents the marginalising of the figure of the feminine in his work in the Husserlian spirit of the constant need for reduction towards ever more primordial phenomenological layers of meaning: “at the time of my little book entitled *Time and the Other*, I thought that femininity was this modality of alterity – this ‘other genus’ – and that sexuality and eroticism were this non-indifference to the other, irreducible to the formal alterity of terms in an ensemble. Today I think that it is necessary to go back even further and

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<sup>216</sup> See ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’ CP47-60 and in particular CP54-56 for the most explicit addressing of this correlation.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid p55

that the exposition, the nudity, and the “imperative demand” of the face of the other constitute this modality that the feminine already presupposes: the proximity of the neighbour is the non-formal alterity.<sup>218</sup> Yet the figure of alterity par excellence with which Levinas replaces that of the feminine is clearly a figure of difference just as determinate and drawn just as much from the empirical world or ‘natural attitude’ as is the latter. Rather than a more fundamental and formalistic reduction, it is evident that Levinas has replaced or simply swapped one figure for another. What is more, this figure belongs identifiably to the Jewish tradition. Levinas has indeed written and spoken of this figure on many occasions, in particular insofar as concerns the importance of this figure for rabbinic Judaism: ‘In Jewish thought, the relation of the master to the disciple is more paternal than the relation of the father to the son. This is an absolutely extraordinary thing. The son has more duties in respect to the master than he has in respect to his father.’<sup>219</sup> ‘The spiritual relation of the master to student is as strong as the conjugal relation’ Levinas informs us in another text. (BV61) From the other as feminine we move in *Totality and Infinity*, that is, towards the master-disciple relation native to a tradition of Judaism orientated towards intellectual study as the centre of religious life. This would in fact also furnish our response to the second line of critique. The transcendence of the other does indeed depend on analogy for its formulation. Yet it is not in analogy with the transcendence of God that the ‘Height’, ‘Mastery’ and ‘Teaching’ of the other can be articulated. That which these characteristics of the other imply is not a cloaked *theology* but rather *anthropology*, one determinative for the messianic dimension in *Totality and Infinity*.

The passage from one empirically determined messianic figure to the next becomes clear once *Totality and Infinity* is considered next to the collection of ‘Jewish’ texts which runs parallel in Levinas’ intellectual career, namely those collected under the title *Difficult Freedom*. In the essay ‘Judaism and the Feminine’ we find the same vision of the alterity of the feminine rendered as a secondary expression and prolegomenon for alterity proper. The characteristics of the Jewish woman, argues Levinas, ‘are fixed by the feminine figures of the Old Testament.’ (DL52) The world of the Old Testament ‘would not have unfolded as it did – and as it is still today – without the secret present, to the point of evanescence, of its mothers, wives and daughters, without their silent steps in the depths and the thicknesses of the real, drawing the very dimension of interiority and rending the world precisely habitable. (DL53) The dimension of the feminine is here as in *Totality and Infinity* closely attached to the

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<sup>218</sup> Robbins (ed) Interviews p115

<sup>219</sup> Ibid p61

dimension of interiority and the dwelling, both of which are symbols for each other: ‘the House, it is the woman, the Talmud says to us . . . the rabbinic tradition feels it like a primordial truth.’ (DL 53) The feminine as ‘genius of the household’, as embodying the values of secrecy and intimacy which are the phenomenological requirements for the interior/dimension of interiority, is here what allows for a place of dwelling in the world after man has made of nature an impersonal and inhabitable place of ‘factories’ and industrial cities’. (DL55) The feminine in itself, however, is inadequate both as a messianic figure and as a figure of humanity. The feminine of the woman does not indeed define the woman, argues Levinas, but rather is only one attribute of a character most essentially determined by a pre-existing ‘human dignity’, one which derives itself from man. (DL57) There is ‘a certain priority of the masculine. It remains the prototype of the human and determines the eschatology in relation to which maternity constitutes itself.’ (DL58) The Eternal Feminine’ issued from the middle ages which Levinas ‘did not hesitate’ to make use of in *Time and the Other* in the construction of the eschatological, is now distrusted as ‘*absent* from Judaism’, and thus not fully capable of expressing the messianic dimension proper. What is this dimension? ‘The justice which will reign between men is equivalent to the presence of God among them. The differences between masculine and feminine are effaced in this messianic time.’ (DL59) The feminine must disappear with the messianic time and the figure of the feminine, ‘where the pure and the impure mix’, must give way to a figure more properly messianic. There is a certain relation between ‘man’ and ‘man’, that is, which more properly reflects the messianic dimension. This relation goes beyond the ‘dimension of the intimate’ opened by the feminine towards ‘the dimension of Height.’ (DL61) Drawing from the same conceptual stock as *Totality and Infinity*, it is in the dimension of Height that the figure of the messianic is revealed.

To what relation is the dimension of ‘Height’ most essentially attached? The messianic relation *par excellence* is identified elsewhere in the same collection, namely in Levinas’ commentary on the messianic chapters of the Talmud. Following speculations and debates over the extent and kind of change the messianic age will bring about, over the hidden meaning of Scripture and the original character of paradise, over the role of merit and repentance in the ushering in of the messianic age and of passive suffering versus action, Levinas poses to the Talmudic doctors the following question: ‘Who is the Messiah?’. He subsequently discusses the significance of three possible names for the Messiah given in *Synhedrin* (98b-99a):

Three possibilities are offered: *Silo*, *Yinon* and *Hanina*. The three names resemble the names of the school masters the students of which pronounced respectively *Silo*, *Yinon* and *Hanina*. The experience in which the messianic personality is rendered manifest is thus in the relation between the student and his master. The relation of student to master which remains, it seems, rigorously intellectual, contains already all the richness of the meeting of the Messiah. (DF124)

The master-disciple relation becomes the locus of the messianic dimension in Judaism. Why? Levinas identifies qualities which the master-disciple relation shares with the relation with the messiah to come. Firstly, the master-disciple relation represents the embodiment par excellence of the peace which is to reign in the messianic age: 'the presence in the teaching of the Master of the advent of the Pacific . . . which all the people will obey.' (DL125) Levinas also engages with psalm 72 in order to identify another quality of the Messiah: 'This psalm does not initially speak of peace but of justice, of aid for the one who has no resource or aid to call on. It is a question of a King who gives to the poor their due, and who brings to bear his authority upon the violent . . . ' (DL125) Alongside peace, the messianic King is to ensure that justice reigns: 'yet this content (justice) already shines in the face of the Master who teaches. The relation of the master to the pupil does not consist in communicating ideas. It carries the first ray of the messianic light itself. (DL125) The master-disciple relation itself 'carries the first ray of light of the messianic' insofar as it embodies already the values of peace and justice which the latter embodies. The basis upon which the master-disciple relation, this purely intellectual relation, is become the embodiment of these values is given slightly earlier in the text. Levinas considers namely the character of sin: 'the sin which separates and isolates has for its part a foundation. This base is error – and yet error is open to the exteriority of teaching . . . Moral perversion is based on an insufficiency of culture. This error is idolatry.' (DL110) Sin, enclosure within oneself, is based on an intellectual fault, that of idolatry or ignorance of transcendence. The teacher comes from 'outside' this self-enclosure to make the self aware of this transcendence via initiation into the life of Scripture - the site of proximity of man and transcendence. The teacher comes from outside to open the naturally isolated, ignorant and idolatrous self to the horizon of transcendence. The horizon of justice is that of the hitherto enclosed self opened to and brought into proximity with transcendence in the life of Scripture by the Master.

From these passages we can by extension extrapolate the core dynamic of the messianism of *Totality and Infinity*. The 'eschatological peace' to which *Totality and infinity* refers is ultimately that of the figure of the other who comes as teacher, one who liberates the self from idolatry and opens it to the dimension of the divine. The 'Height' or the messianic character

of the other in *Totality and Infinity* is not in analogy with God but in analogy with the Talmudic doctor coming from the perspective of the mastery of Scripture, opening the self in ignorance of Scripture, and thus in idolatry, to the life of Scripture. For Levinas the dimension of Height from which the Master comes does not amount to any form of apotheosis. The 'Height' comes entirely from the powers of *initiation* with which the master has been endowed. The master's messianic powers of *deliverance* are one with his powers of *initiating* into the 'eternal present' of revelation through the Oral Torah, continuing from one generation to the next unbroken from Sinai. The marginalising of the feminine as messianic figure par excellence in *Totality and Infinity* is thus in function of more or less direct translation into Levinas' 'phenomenological' writings of a messianic figure belonging securely to the Jewish tradition. It is the translation of the relation which Levinas considers as most central to, as the very *pinnacle* of the life of the Jewish community and religious life, into the universal figure as the *basis* of society in general.

In a later Talmudic commentary Levinas explores in greater detail the light of 'messianic peace' which shines through the master-disciple relation. In the commentary from *Beyond the Verse* titled 'Cities of Refuge', Levinas undertakes a hermeneutic of the Talmudic passages concerning the cities designated as safe areas for those guilty of 'objective crimes', crimes committed inadvertently in which the injured parties have nonetheless the right to exact vengeance. On the one hand, Levinas is concerned with showing the contemporary character or the spirit of 'urban humanism' which the Talmud evinces in these passages. In effect Levinas renders the notion of the 'city of refuge' a metaphor for the urban life of the western bourgeoisie, for 'occidental society, free and civilized, but without social equality and without rigorous social justice' threatened by the vengeful attitudes of the disadvantaged from other parts of the world and from within these very societies. (BV56/7) On the other hand, Levinas is concerned with detailing what is to be the 'city of refuge' par excellence - the Torah. Levinas explains why the Torah should be considered as such:

'Is it not eternal life itself, pure act of the intellect and as such indifferent to death, and thus, Torah stronger than death? Complete awakening of the soul. Life which is never in phase with the various forms of violence in the world.' (BV62)

The Torah is the 'city of refuge' par excellence because study of the Torah grants 'eternal life'. This is a metaphor: it grants 'eternal life' insofar as indifferent absorption in the Torah implies a state of indifference towards death or of concern for oneself in general as well as expressing the impossibility of violence within the closed circle of those at study. In the

closed circled of questions and answers from master to disciple and vice versa, one is cut off from the death and the violence of the exterior world. Levinas reiterates: 'the one who unites himself with it (the Torah) in study would never be exposed to death. In the world of violence in which we live, the intellectual life is a mode of being such as is never in phase with the causality of the world.' (BV64) In this emphasis on the inviolable 'refuge' which the intellectual study of the Torah constitutes, not isolated but collective study in a fraternity based on indifference towards oneself and openness to the text and to the others gathered around the text, the *mitnagged* roots of Levinas' Judaism are manifest. This is evidently an expansion of the theme of the messianic 'peace' which shines in the face of the Master outlined summarily in *Difficult Freedom*, and as such sheds light upon the peculiar character of this messianism. This 'messianic peace', that is, is in no way the harbinger of a messianic age to come but rather the guarantor of a 'place of refuge' *set apart* from the 'violence of the world' which *nonetheless* continues around it. It constitutes an inflexion of messianism, in which it is direct from being a messianism of the messianic age to a messianism of a sanctified place of refuge. In *Beyond the Verse*, it is true, the Torah as place of refuge becomes a messianic cipher in Zionist fashion for the future place of refuge which the city of Jerusalem is to become. Jerusalem as 'place of refuge' will fully embody and realises the 'humanity of the Torah', and in truth will *no longer* be a 'city of refuge' since in a realised humanity there will no longer be any vengeance to fear or objective and universally shared injustice to measure, humanity having been liberated from the 'disorder where each existent is concerned with his own existence.' (DF68) What remains to be seen, however, is how this theme of this messianism of the 'city of refuge' echoes in Levinas' philosophical writings.

In cross referencing the qualities of 'Height', 'teaching' etc in these texts and in *Totality and Infinity*, what we are confronted with in Levinas' philosophical writings is evidently a universalising of the messianic figure of the Master found in Levinas' Talmudic commentaries: such a figure is arrived at by Levinas as if fortuitously via phenomenological reduction, accomplished in the move in which the place of *Scripture* in *Difficult Freedom* is taken by the place of *language as such* in *Totality and Infinity*. As the student at first lost in idolatry is initiated into the life of Scripture, so the self, primordially silent, is initiated into language by the other. The messianic relation in *Totality and Infinity* turns not upon any analogy between the other and God but rather upon a certain underlying and unarticulated analogy between Scripture and language in general. Chalier is most sensitive to the importance of this dimension of Levinas' thought: 'Levinas' Judaism', she relates, is 'inseparable from the oral tradition of the reading of the Torah, a reading particular to the

Talmud.’<sup>220</sup> Levinas’ Judaism and, we should add, his *philosophy* is founded on the spirit of a certain Judaism based on the constant renewal of tradition across the master-disciple relation, a relation through which the Torah is rendered ever present and alive: ‘Study irreducible however to erudite knowledge, study which puts into play the speech of master and of disciple because the Torah and the Talmud are not transmitted without incessant questioning. Deprived of human interrogation, stacked on the shelves of a library, their life deserts them.’<sup>221</sup> The ‘intellectual relation’ between master and student across the Oral Torah is always more than simply intellectual *insofar as* relation: without this relation, if the Torah were to become simply a question of knowledge and not ever renewed engagement across conversation and teaching, then it would perish taking the core of Jewish communal life with it. In the translation of this motif from Judaism into philosophy, therefore, this constant renewal of *Scripture* in the Oral Torah across the relation between still ‘uncultured’ student and master becomes phenomenologically the constant renewal and recreation of *language* across the relation between silent self and other.

With this translation in mind, we are able to illuminate in what sense the messianism which Levinas only refers to explicitly in the preface and conclusion of *Totality and Infinity* runs throughout this work. Thus we can decipher the sense of the recurring theme of the ‘welcome’ of the other in *Totality and Infinity*: ‘the welcome of the face which language presupposes.’ (TI189) The ‘welcome’ by the other ‘which language presupposes’ namely serves the same function as *initiation* within the Jewish content which the reading of scripture presupposes. Thus we can in addition appreciate the importance which ‘conversation’ takes on in *Totality and Infinity*: ‘the idea of infinity is produced in the opposition of conversation, in sociality.’ (TI197) it is namely the site of the translation of the dialectic of the master-disciple relation across the Oral Torah: ‘the proposition that posits and offers the world does not float in the air, but promises a response to him who receives this proposition, who directs himself towards the other because in his proposition he receives the possibility of questioning. Questioning is not explained by astonishment only, but by the presence of him to whom it is addressed. A proposition is maintained in the outstretched field of questions and answers.’ (TI96) Questioning does not begin, as it did for the Greeks, in pure wonder but by virtue of a question posed by the master to the disciple, a question which demands a response and promises an appraisal. This is the beginning not only of philosophy: this dynamic is to

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<sup>220</sup> Chalier, C *La Trace de l’Infini: Emmanuel Levinas et la Source Hébraïque* (Paris, Les Editions du Cerf, 2002) p18

<sup>221</sup> Ibid p17



underlie all conversation or sociality. It is to become the universal archetype for all intersubjective experience.

Messianism in *Totality and Infinity* is the result of the translation of the cultural specific relation across the Oral Torah by Levinas into the domain of the phenomenology of intersubjectivity almost without modification. This is not to deny the sophistication of such a translation, which is as subtle as it is ingenious. The primordial silence of the ego is inferred by Levinas from its inability to have rendered the world meaningful from within the self-enclosed horizon of transcendental intuition. Levinas keys into critiques of Husserl on the question of the relation between language and intuition. What is apparent is that Husserl was guilty of a certain naivety concerning the self-sufficiency of intuition in intentionality, or the 'straightforwardness that characterises the relationship between noesis and noema.' 'The reality given to receptivity and the meaning which it can take on seem distinguishable' Levinas tell us 'as if experience first gave contents – forms, solidity, roughness, colour, sound, savour, odour, heat, heaviness etc – and then all these contents were animated with meta-phors, receiving an overloading through which they are borne beyond the given.' (HAH17) Yet there can be no immediate intuitive grasping or satisfaction in the intentionality of an object; in each perception of an object in experience we are always already carried beyond the immediacy of that experience. Already the immediate data of experience are animated by metaphors and by significations, and already within experience intuition is carried beyond itself into language. Intelligibility is the 'beyond' or 'absence' already at the heart of intuition, which refers intuition beyond itself. Experience refers beyond itself, as the metaphors and significations which render it meaningful refer to other metaphors and significations which refer to others etc. There is already the hermeneutical leap beyond the part to the totality of meaning and back again. As such 'experience is already an act of interpretation, comprehension of meaning, exegesis, a hermeneutic, and not an intuition.' (HAH17) It is this universal 'exegesis' of experience into which the master-disciple relation animating the Oral Torah is translated. As the ignorant and idolatrous self requires initiation into the exegesis of the Jewish textual tradition, so the silent self cannot draw the beyond, that of the world of signification or of intelligibility which already animates immediate experience, from this experience. Intuition presupposes intelligibility, yet intuition cannot come to intelligibility through its own resources, therefore intelligibility must have been taught from outside. A beyond must already have entered the self; the self must have been *initiated* into intelligibility by another.

The crossing of two trajectories reveals the character of the evolution of the messianic dimension in Levinas' work. The marginalising of the messianic figure of the feminine and of the caress in favour of the messianism of the other who commands from a position of Height and who teaches, occurs in parallel with the translation, under the form of 'reduction', of the master-disciple anthropology governing the initiation into and renewal of the life of Scripture. The translation of this figure occurs, one might also add, at a more fundamental level of Levinas' phenomenology than that of the depiction of other as 'widow, stranger, orphan': the 'destitution' and 'nudity' of the other arises from the fact that the other takes a privileged position outside Being, is *homeless* within Being. The other takes up this privileged position among the world of things in Being by virtue of being the 'teacher' whose 'teaching' opens language and signification in which things ultimately clothe themselves. The highlighting and extraction of this figure from Levinas metaphorical armoury in order to examine it in more detail is thus of the highest significance. What function does this translation ultimately serve? What values does this anthropology take on once translated from its cultural specific surroundings into a universal archetype? What concerns do this function and these values betray beyond the postmodern aspect of Levinas' work? Once translated into Levinas' philosophy, what is specifically 'messianic' about this 'messianic' figure? To respond to these questions, we need to take another look at the process of marginalisation which defines the first trajectory.

### Totality and Infinity: From Difference to 'Straightforwardness'

Messianism in *Totality and Infinity* is determined by a process of evolution in which one eschatological figure, that of the feminine, is marginalised by another, that of the master in the master-disciple relation. Two questions concerning this immediately suggest themselves. Given that one does not replace but rather simply marginalises the other, the first question would be: what relation therefore exists between these two figures? The answer is in fact no relation. The relation with the feminine is in some way to presuppose the experience of the face, and yet much of Derrida's later critique of Levinas centres on the fact that the relation with the other as feminine takes place earlier in *Totality and Infinity* than the relation with the other.<sup>222</sup> Chanter's appraisal of Levinas, we noted, likewise demonstrating how, despite, the marginalising of the figure of the feminine, Levinas' account of the face to face relation with

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<sup>222</sup> Derrida, *Adieu* p37

the other still presupposes to a large extent some of the structural elements of the feminine figure of alterity. Bergo argues that the relation between the narrative of alterity of the other as master and that of the other as feminine, with the dimension of fecundity and paternity which follow from it, is ultimately that of *rivalry*.<sup>223</sup> Our second and at present more important question: what necessitates the evolution from one eschatological vision to another? This question has not in fact received sufficient attention in Levinas scholarship. The eschatological relation with the other as the correlation of the social relation with the face and the metaphysical relation with infinity via the site of the other as master has, we observed, almost exclusively interpreted as an articulation of a certain postmodern ethics where the non-identity of the other is taken as a value in itself however it might be formulated. The difference in evaluation of the two paradigms is thus lost.

To ask the same question in a slightly different fashion: what is it that ultimately renders the experience of the alterity of the feminine unworthy for Levinas of being the principle articulation of the messianic dimension? For Stanford, we observed, it is due to Levinas' attempt to articulate phenomenologically a Platonic informed non-erotic desire. This explanation, undeniably valid in one sense, places however too great an emphasis on the 'Greek' rather than 'Hebrew' aspect of this relation informing the master-disciple anthropology. We have already seen some of characteristics of the feminine at work. The relation with the feminine occurs outside, both before and after, language. The feminine signifies 'intimacy' rather than the 'authority' embodied in the 'height' of the master. The feminine face, in its erotic nudity, is an inversion of the face of the master or the nudity of 'pure expression'. The feminine goes 'beyond the face' whilst nonetheless presupposing the advent of the transcendence which it embodies. The feminine rests between 'purity' and 'impurity', 'profanation' and 'modesty', 'exhibitionism' and 'virginity'. 'If the other person (the master) resembles God, the beloved (the feminine) resembles at the same time God and the devil.'<sup>224</sup> Thus for Kayser: 'the feminine face insofar as erotic face is the equivocal par excellence.'<sup>225</sup> Most fundamentally the feminine represents *equivocation*: 'in the feminine face the purity of expression is already troubled by the equivocation of the voluptuous.'(TI260) To this dimension of the feminine as 'equivocation' a chain of other parallel values can be added. The feminine other is 'mysterious', as we saw in *Time and the Other*, the dimension of '*mystery*' as such. The feminine is the dimension of '*secrecy*', of a

<sup>223</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p105 'one wonders to what extent this concrete temporality does not compete with the time of ethical transcendence to make possible the apology and the welcome.'

<sup>224</sup> Kayser, P *Emmanuel Levinas: La Trace du Féminin* (Paris, Presses Universitaires Paris, 2000) p48

<sup>225</sup> Ibid p50

secret which is profaned and yet nonetheless remains secret, insofar as it is the dimension of the secret, the mysterious as such, which appears: 'the secret appears without appearing, not because it would appear halfway, or with reservations, or in confusion. The simultaneity of the *clandestine* and the exposed precisely defines *profanation*.' (TI257) The feminine comes from the '*subterranean*' and '*nocturnal*' dimension. (TI257) The feminine is the dimension of the '*hidden*'. The feminine represents the 'inversion of signification', the 'sinking into the *equivocation* of silence', into 'innuendos' into 'laughter' and 'playfulness'. (TI263) The feminine represents the *equivocation* of being in the position of both 'master and slave'. (TI265)

Thus if the feminine represents equivocation, mystery, secrecy, innuendo etc. then what does the figure of the other as master represent? What, in other words, necessitates the translation of the dynamic of the master-disciple relation and of conversation across Oral Torah into phenomenology? What *function* does this dynamic take on in *Totality and Infinity*? 'Teaching, the end of equivocation or confusion, is a thematisation of phenomenon.' (TI99) The relation with the master, the relation with the one who initiates us into language represents the 'end of equivocation'. Alternatively: 'the speech which already dawns in the face that looks at me looking introduces the primary frankness of revelation'. (TI98) The speech of the other, the upsurge of language by virtue of the gaze which looks at me rather than constituting the object of my vision, is characterised by a 'primary frankness'. In addition, Levinas speaks of the 'total transparency of the gaze directed upon the gaze, the absolute frankness of the face to face proffered at the bottom of all speech.' (TI182) The face of the other represents 'pure sincerity' or 'original sincerity of expression'. (TI202) All language, all exchange of signs, presuppose the 'straightforwardness of the face to face.' (TI202) The other as master represents here the relation of 'absolute frankness' or a relation of 'total transparency'. 'Deceit and veracity already presuppose the absolute authenticity of the face – the privileged case of a presentation of being foreign to the alternative of truth and non-truth, circumventing the ambiguity of the true and the false which every truth risks.' (TI202) Against the 'equivocation' of the eschatological relation with the feminine is placed the 'frankness', 'honesty', 'uprightness', 'sincerity', 'straightforwardness', 'transparency', 'authenticity' of the eschatological relation with the master. The other as master does not fundamentally communicate to the self via signs, a communication which would inevitably introduce equivocation and ambiguity: the other in phenomenological terms *initiates* the self into language, and thus partakes of primordial sincerity without which any communication of signs would not be possible.

As such, what is at stake here are not simply difference and non-identity as values in themselves. Both the feminine and the master are after all figures of alterity. What distinguishes the respective importance in *Totality and Infinity* of these two models of alterity depends on subsequent valuations.<sup>226</sup> The other as master represents ‘the privileged case of a presentation of being foreign to the alternative of truth and non-truth’. The other as master is not tied to the ambiguities and indeterminacies of the language games played within the economy of the same. The value of the alterity of the other par excellence in *Totality and Infinity* is *not* difference or non-identity as a value in itself but ‘sincerity’ or ‘straightforwardness’. Caputo compares Levinas to Derrida, noting that while for the latter alterity is “desert-ified,” ‘comes to me like a voice in the desert, with a certain desert-like dryness or indeterminacy’ Levinas ‘will not settle for this undecidability. He wants to back it up, as it were, by rooting it in a desire for the Good, a desire for God, Who deflects this desire from itself — Himself, Herself? — and orders us to the neighbour, almost as if this were a certain divine command theory. That is a more robust sense of transcendence than phenomenology allows.’<sup>227</sup> In effect, according to Caputo, Levinas recoils in face of the pure alterity of the other, and the ‘indeterminacy’ which pure alterity, difference as such, represents essentially. As such Levinas goes beyond the limits of any defensible phenomenology, grafting onto the latter a theology of ‘divine command’ in order to cleanse the relation of its indeterminacy and ambiguity. This is tied to the belief, understandable but as we have suggested mistaken, that Levinas can only cultivate the privileged character of the other via analogy with God. Once the anthropological rather than theological character of the analogy is understood, however, its phenomenological intelligibility becomes clear. In fact, the lack of ambiguity of the other is, certainly insofar as messianism is concerned in *Totality and Infinity*, its most essential phenomenological characteristic. Levinas does not take fright before the ambiguity of alterity, for according to the *phenomenology* of the other, one based not on theological analogy with God but on the dialectics of the Oral Torah, the other is the one who can never present himself in ambiguous fashion. The other is the non-ambiguous par excellence. This non-ambiguity, sincerity or straightforwardness comes to constitute the very privileged character, the very *alterity*, of the other; its very messianic character is determined by these values.

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<sup>226</sup> The most explicit occurrence of this valuation occurs in NLT88 where Levinas writes of the ‘ambiguity’ and essential ‘amphibology’ of eros, ‘at the antipodes of the Torah which is the order of the non-equivocal.’

<sup>227</sup> Wyschrogod, E, Caputo, J ‘Postmodernism and the Desire for God: An E-Mail Exchange’ *Cross Currents*, vol 48 no 3 (1998), pp293-310 (p297)

Messianism in Levinas is a messianism of ‘straightforwardness’ and not exclusively or even principally of ‘non-identity’. A consideration of the relation with the other in terms of the latter is not able to arrive at the specifically messianic significance of the former. Kosky considers the metaphysics of expression in *Totality and Infinity*, detailing the fashion in which the face for Levinas expresses itself *kat’auto*, entirely from and according to it itself. He considers this *kat’auto* character of expression as concerned above all with the articulation of the freedom of the other from any ‘horizon’. ‘For the comprehension of Being, both the question of Being and existence in the world, *l’étant* is manifest as such only in a reference relation that posits it within the context of the world or the horizon of Being.’ Beings take on sense normally only within the global network of significations within the horizon in which they appear, whilst the other expresses itself *kat’auto* and is therefore free from inclusion within any horizon. Thus as opposed to the ‘relative otherness’ of the world of beings, the face of the other takes on the aspect of ‘absolute otherness.’<sup>228</sup> This is indisputably an essential aspect of Levinas’ vision of the postmodern *metaphysics* of alterity. What Kosky omits from this consideration of expression is the value of the ‘straightforwardness’ and ‘sincerity’ which this signification outside any horizon for Levinas entails. As such, while the metaphysical character of this relation is understood, the specifically messianic character of the relation with the other remains unarticulated.

The transformation from messianic figure of other as feminine to that of the other as interlocutor occurs in view of the value of ‘straightforwardness’ or primordial ‘sincerity’; the translation of the master-disciple relation from its cultural specific context to the ‘universal’ realm of philosophy occurs in function of this values. We now have to understand what this ‘straightforwardness’ or ‘sincerity’ ultimately signifies in *Totality and Infinity* and why these values show be considered messianic or eschatological values. We need to understand in addition their link to what we called the dynamics of the sanctification and the fetishisation of the human. We have already seen the fashion in which sanctification and messianism are conflated in *Difficult Freedom*: the messianic power of the Talmudic doctor is one with his powers of initiation into the realm of the sanctified and atemporal fenced off from history and the violence which it embodies. We need to see how this dynamic of initiation into the *sanctus* of the life of Judaism translates into the initiation into the *sanctus* of the human. For this, a consideration of the ‘political’ dimension of Levinas’ thought is required. It is worth recalling that in *Difficult Freedom* the messianic figure of the master takes on precisely its

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<sup>228</sup> Kosky, *Philosophy and Religion* p19

messianic character insofar as representing the embodiment of peace. A concern with public order and collective life, Levinas tell us, is already at stake in the intellectual relation with master. (DF125) The initiation into the life of Scripture is after all for Levinas the initiation into the life of the Jewish community as such. The language into which the master here initiates is the language of ‘a volume lived in by a people; but also volume from which this people is nourished almost in a literal sense.’ The language of Scripture is framed as the ‘eternal’ way of access to the fraternity of an ‘eternal people’. (HS177) What remains to be seen is how within the phenomenological realm the same dynamic opens a way of access to the *sanctus* of the human.

### Conclusion

To fully understand messianism in Levinas we need to go beyond the postmodern Levinas. Levinas’ messianism is not principally concerned with difference as a value in itself, as the metaphysical exteriority beyond onto-theological transcendence or as particularity beyond totality. The evolution of the eschatological dimension in Levinas’ work from one messianic figure to the other puts into play another opposition, one which becomes a determining structure of *Totality and Infinity*. This opposition is not that of ‘same versus other’ but of equivocality/ambiguity versus sincerity/straightforwardness. The repulsing of the messianic figure of the feminine from the centre of totality is expressed via the status of radical ‘equivocation’ which Levinas now assigns to it. Underlying *Totality and Infinity* meanwhile is the translation, not of a theology but of a certain anthropology under the guise of a phenomenological reduction. This is the anthropology of the master-disciple relation revolving around the dialectics of the Oral Torah and initiation into the world of Scripture. This anthropology instead becomes the phenomenological initiation into language in general and, once entering the realm of Levinas’ ‘philosophical’ writings, comes to embody the value of a radical or primordial ‘straightforwardness’ or ‘sincerity’. What precisely is messianic about this ‘straightforwardness’, or alternatively, why should it require articulation in messianic terms? To answer this we will need to determine the function of this value within the global matrix of *Totality and Infinity*.

## CHAPTER 4) MESSIANISM IN *TOTALITY AND INFINITY*

### Introduction

In the last chapter, Messianism in *Totality and Infinity* was found to be centred on the value of a primordial ‘straightforwardness’, ‘sincerity’ or ‘frankness’, the value which the ‘messianic’ master-disciple anthropology takes on once translated from Levinas’ Talmudic into phenomenological terms. We contrasted the messianic logic of *Totality and Infinity* with the metaphysical logic with which it is normally conflated: we will explore the relation between these logics in this chapter. The present chapter is concerned with determining the precise function of ‘straightforwardness’ in *Totality and Infinity*, in the course of which we will be in a position to explain what is meant by the ‘parody’ of messianism. This will require an engagement with an aspect of Levinas’ discourse for the most part ignored in considerations of messianism in his work. This aspect is namely that of the passage from ‘ethics’ to ‘justice’, or the passage from the question of the intimate relation with the individual other to the question of society as a whole as Levinas formulates it. Rather than consider this passage an addendum to Levinas’ eschatological theory, messianism in Levinas will be considered from the outset as a response to this passage. In order to appreciate the significance of messianism here, however, this passage will have to be reconstructed as to its implicit logic. We will begin our consideration with the passage from ‘ethics’ to ‘justice’, or from the ‘other’ to the ‘third’, as well as some of the major commentaries on this passage. It is from the point of departure of certain paradoxes in Levinas’ theory which these commentaries highlight that the function of the messianic value ‘straightforwardness’ in Levinas will be determined. We will then explore how this value is implicated in the dynamics of the sanctification and fetishisation of the human in *Totality and Infinity*. We will explore consequently how it is implicated in the parody of messianism.

Central to our understanding of messianism in *Totality and Infinity* is an understanding the model or *models* of totality with which it is negotiating. Throughout this chapter, therefore, appeal will be made to representatives of a school of thought united around their shared concern with the concept of totality. We will have recourse, in other words, to different figures from the tradition of western Marxism, demonstrating how Levinas shares with these figures to a significant extent the same problematic, whilst also demonstrating how Levinas departs from them in the strategy he proposes for engaging with it.



### From Ethics to Justice

We have tried to view the topic of messianism from the perspective of different talking points in recent scholarship on Levinas, and in this chapter we will take another as point of departure. This is the question of the passage from ethics to justice or politics, what in Levinas comes under the cipher of the passage from the relation with the 'other' person to the relation with the 'third party'.

We observed that the eschatological relation in *Totality and Infinity* is formulated by Levinas as a means of providing the condition of possibility for any morality. The relation of 'eschatological peace' with the other both renders possible and demands, despite the inescapable reality of war within the objective course of history, the exercise of moral judgment: 'the eschatological, as the "beyond" of history, draws being out of the jurisdiction of history and the future; it arouses them and calls them forth to their full responsibility.' (TI23) Levinas effects a reduction of the eschatological notion of the 'last judgement': 'It is not the last judgment that is decisive, but the judgment of all the instants of time, when the living are judged.' (TI23) Each moment becomes a moment for the 'last judgment': at each moment history can be subject to judgment without need for reference to the objective course of history, or to the suspension of judgement in expectation of the outcome of this course, or in function of the norms which impose themselves at a given stage of this course. Such a notion of judgement is formulated in particular against, we noted, Hegelian theodicy. This relation of 'eschatological peace' in *Totality and Infinity* can be cross-referenced, we argued, with the 'messianic peace' which already shines in the face of the master in Levinas' messianic texts in *Difficult Freedom*.

The individual subject is obliged via the eschatological relation of 'peace' with the other to judge history at each moment: how is this judgement to take place? In fact, whilst the relation with the face of the other is the condition of possibility for judgment, it is not itself the occasion for judgement. Alternatively put, the relation with the other is the occasion only for the judgment of the I by the other: 'to hear his destitution which cries out for justice is not to represent an image to oneself, but is to posit oneself as responsible.' (TI215) The ego cannot initially represent any one else as just or unjust, for it is the other which from the start judges the self. To relate to a face is to automatically feel oneself responsible, to feel oneself judged. A further dynamic is required before the ego can judge others.

Judgment becomes possible only via the passage from the relation with the 'other' to the relation with the 'third party': the ego can in turn judge the other, can command the other, and

be commanded to do so by the other, because of the presence of *other* others. Judgement arises when he is responsible not simply for one other but for another other, called the 'third party'. The ego is judged and not capable of judging the other, and yet must judge the relation of the third with the other and vice versa *for the sake of* the other as well as the third. Wrongs committed by the other upon the third or the third upon the other are the ego's responsibility. Thus the self is in turn called to command the other and third. This Levinas calls 'prophetism': 'by essence the prophetic word responds to the epiphany of the face, doubles all discourse not as a discourse about moral themes, but as an irreducible movement of a discourse which by essence is aroused by the epiphany of the face inasmuch as it attests the presence of the third party, the whole of humanity, in the eyes that look at me.' (TI213) 'Prophetic' discourse, in which the self is called on to compare and judge other others, it should be emphasised, is no longer simply 'moral' discourse. The very dynamic which allows us to pass from the judged to the judge, the very condition of possibility of morality in other words, already takes us beyond morality, or at least 'doubles' up moral discourse with another discourse. 'Like a shunt', Levinas adds, 'every social relation leads us back to presentation of the other to the same'. (TI213) The relation with the other, as Levinas presents it, is 'doubled up' with the relation with the third and this relation lead us back to the 'same'. It leads us back, in other words, to the very totality the relation with the other was originally supposed to judge.

Levinas specifies in more detail later in *Totality and Infinity* that with which morality must here be 'doubled': 'In the measure that the face of the Other relates us with the third party, the metaphysical relation of the I with the Other moves into the form of the We, aspires to a State, institutions, laws, which are the source of universality.' (TI 300) 'Morality' or 'ethics' is to be 'doubled up' with the dimensions of politics, bureaucracy and jurisprudence, all for the sake of the arbitration between other and third. Levinas names this dynamic of supplementation 'justice', a recurring theme in Levinas' work. The following is a typical example from Levinas' corpus:

It is the hour of justice. The love of neighbour and his original right as unique and incomparable to which I must respond, by itself calls for a Reason capable of comparing the incomparables, a wisdom of love. A measure superimposes itself upon the extravagant 'generosity' of the one for the other, upon its infinity. Here the right of the unique, the original right of the man, calls forth judgment and henceforth objectivity, objectification, thematisation, synthesis. Necessary are institutions which arbitrate and a political authority which supports them. Justice demands and founds the State. There is indeed the indispensable uniqueness of the human to the

particularity of the individual of the human genus, to the condition of citizen. Derivation. Although its motivating imperative is inscribed in the very right of the other man, unique and incomparable. (EN202)

Unreasonable and unreflecting generosity before the other must give way to rational consideration of duties and rights, including one's own. The 'incomparables', the other and the third, must be compared and there must therefore be arbitration on the part of the ego and society in general. 'Justice' and moral 'judgment' call for politics, for the state, for the insertion of the other into history and totality.

Yet it was precisely morality which in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* was to be asserted *against* politics, eschatology to be asserted *against* history. This was necessary in order that history and politics be judged. How then are they to be judged? They are to be judged as *necessary*. What is the difference between the inescapability of politics in the 'reality is war' and its necessity? The difference is apparently that politics should take place in recognition of that which it has sacrificed, namely the uniqueness of the other, a *necessary* sacrifice: it should not take place in good conscience: 'politics left to itself bears a tyranny within itself; it deforms the I and the other who have given rise to it, for it judges them according to universal rules and in absentia. (TI300) What is the difference between the necessary sacrifice and the theodicy by which the politics of reality as war is structured in *Totality and Infinity*? Is not all theodicy conducted in view of the peace it is to bring about, and is this peace not inscribed as such in the very structure of war? Levinas writes as much himself. (TI26) What is this difference between the politics which does not proceed from the relation with the other and that which does? This problem has not gone unnoticed in the secondary literature. The following critique from Weitzman articulates it in most unsparing fashion:

One might well argue that even if Levinas's political thought follows a circular path, the detour taken through the possibilities of otherwise-than-being nevertheless create a meaningful, if subtle, difference. And yet this is not borne out by Levinas's own words. Again, it is remarkable how quickly -- automatically, even -- Levinas turns to traditional concepts of jurisprudence and, even more problematically, of the nation-state: historical constructs for which the western onto-theology that Levinas so virulently critiques spent much time and energy providing the philosophical foundations. . . It is careless to say the least that Levinas should denounce Hegelian historiography and then unquestioningly accept Hegelian statecraft as a mere given. If it is at times a grudging acceptance -- and at times it is anything but grudging -- it is nonetheless a total one.<sup>229</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Weitzman, E 'Necessary Interruption: Traces of the Political in Levinas' *Theory and Event* Vol11, No2 (2008) pp92-116 (p94)

What meaning, if any, has the eschatological relation with the other in *Totality and Infinity* as in essence condition of possibility for judgment when, via the relation with the third, Levinas ‘merely brings us back to where we started, with being and with totalization?’<sup>230</sup> Similarly, For Caygill, Levinas’ position, rather than guarding against the totalitarian potentialities of the state, to an uncomfortable extent ‘assumes the fragility of proximity and the superior power of the state’. Levinas has conceded too much to the ontology of ‘being’ as ‘war’, leaving its structures intact.<sup>231</sup>

Does Levinas’ articulation of the horizon of an ‘eschatological peace’ within *Totality and Infinity* thus represent a failure? Kavka argues that the ultimate significance of messianism in Levinas is its political extension, insofar as the messianic relation with the other invests the self with a political mission: ‘it announces me as God’s agent with the power to act ethically and create political institutions that reflect that power. Prophecy announces the possibility of all persons being the Messiah (the possibility of giving up my own possibilities for others.)’<sup>232</sup> Yet what power and what political institutions are here to be created are somewhat taken for granted by Kavka. For Chalier as for Plüss, the practical application of Levinas’ messianism lies more in the realm of scriptural hermeneutics, in which both are ways of access to the radically ‘concealed’ dimension of true humanity.<sup>233</sup> Chalier considers the possibility whether Levinas in his detaching of the messianic dimension from any sense of historical teleology or consideration of political application does not accomplish a ‘neutralising’ of messianism, using a term borrowed from Scholem to describe the post- Sabbatian, non-apocalyptic reconstruction of messianism effectuated by Hassidism. Yet rather than a neutralising of messianism, Chalier argues, Levinas rather seeks to reveal the true meaning of messianism beyond any merely political sense or any concern with a future world. Messianism becomes as such, precisely in rather Hassidic terms, a question of individual experience<sup>234</sup> For Vanni it is precisely because the relation with the other is defined as eschatological that impotence on the political level manifests itself. He writes of the ‘blockage’ of the possibility of any practical transcription caused by this eschatological orientation. The eschatological aspect of Levinas work leads to an ‘ethics of pure “patience”, without authentic possibility of practical engagement.’<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>230</sup> Ibid p93

<sup>231</sup> Caygill, H *Levinas and the Political* (London : Routledge, 2002) p143

<sup>232</sup> Kavka, Jewish Messianism p179

<sup>233</sup> Ibid p68

<sup>234</sup> Chalier, Utopie Messianique p63

<sup>235</sup> Vanni, Impatience des Réponses p69

Does messianism in Levinas fail? Is indeed its failure inscribed within it from the outset? Alternatively, is this apparent failure evidence of the ‘unfinished’ character of his work?<sup>236</sup> Whether it represents a failure or not depends on the question to which it is regarded as response, the problematic to which it is regarded as resolution. As opposed to viewing Levinas’ work as ultimately a failure or as unfinished, we aim to show how his response is perfectly adequate to the question posed. It can be regarded as such, however, only if Levinas’ particular understanding of this question of the ‘political’ is appreciated. The question of the ‘third’ is the question of *Totality and Infinity* and that an understanding of the role of messianism in *Totality and Infinity* requires an understanding of what precisely is at stake in this question. We emphasized the anthropology which articulates itself around the rabbinic praxis of scriptural hermeneutics as the locus of messianism in Levinas. Our goal is to demonstrate how this anthropology is ‘political’ from the outset, how the question of the ‘political’ is the principle question of this text. A review of some of the principal commentaries of the political dimension of Levinas’ thought will be of aid in clarifying our position.

### Other to the Third, Third to the Other

The passage from the other to the third in *Totality and Infinity*, as it is explicitly formulated in any case, is a question of the passage from morality to justice, from ethics to politics: from the act of being judged to the act of judging, the fact of being responsible to the fact of exercising rights. There is not only the ego and the other; there is also ‘a third party’. By virtue of the exigencies posed by this situation, we pass from the immediate ethical context of infinite and irreplaceable responsibility before a particular and irreplaceable other, to the context of measured judgment, justice and rationality, to law courts and to governments. Beyond this, however, it is worth emphasising from the outset that at stake are not two separate forms of relation. The relation with the other and the relation with the third are more essentially two different modalities of the *same* relation. Once there is an other *and* a third, another other whose right to our attention must also be considered, the initial other *also* becomes a third. We have from this moment, in other words, not one other and one third, but two ‘thirds’; or alternatively we have two ‘others’. We relate to two (or more) ‘others’ who

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<sup>236</sup> Horowitz, A ‘Beyond Rational Peace: On the Possibility/Necessity of a Levinasian Hyperpolitics’ in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* ed. by Horowitz, A and Horowitz, G (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006) pp27-47 (p30)

are both also ‘thirds’ insofar as their status as ‘third’ is laid upon their persisting underlying status as ‘other’.

The passage from the other to the third has received increasing attention in recent scholarship on Levinas. On the one hand, there are those who consider this passage positively. Levinas’ formulation of the foundation of politics in terms of this passage has often been interpreted as providing the outlines for a radical reorientation of political theory. Hayat initiates a persistent tradition of scholarship in considering Levinas’ work as involving a critical regrounding of liberalism: it proscribes for politics the guarding of an open space of free discussion, a constant willingness for revision and a respect for plurality set against any tendencies towards totalitarianism.<sup>237</sup> Critchley, although not uncritical of Levinas, sees the dynamic which Levinas establishes between the face to face relation and politics as a necessary supplement to contemporary French political theory.<sup>238</sup> Levinas offers a tonic to the latter’s posing of the question of ‘the political’ in terms of irresistible, structural processes at a collective level by keeping in view the ‘empirical, contingent field’ of direct, inter-subjective relation.<sup>239</sup> Alternatively, Levinas’ vision of the passage of the other to the third is formulated by both Simmons and Hughes as necessitating an overturning of the basis of political theory since Hobbes. No longer is the basis and justification of the State the war of all against all of isolated and allergic individuals; the condition of political life rather becomes the original ethical encounter of peace. Rather than representing a species of violence which mitigates an original violence, the political sphere must henceforth keep in mind the violence and betrayal of the original relation which it involves in a spirit of constant self-critique.<sup>240</sup> Derrida likewise highlights the salutary influence which Levinas work represents within the domain of political theory. The recognition, necessitated by Levinas’ vision of the birth of justice in the relation with the other, of the singularity of each individual judged, serves to remind all who would judge of the moment of hesitancy and uncertainty in each judgement. Levinas’ work serves to remind us, argues, Derrida, that no laws can be regarded as static and pre-existing but must always justify themselves anew in the moment of judgement always in process,

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<sup>237</sup> Hayat, P *Emmanuel Levinas, éthique et société* (Editions Kime, Paris, 1995) p97. This liberalist vision of Levinas has been subject to some recent criticism see for example Tahmesebi

<sup>238</sup> For Critchley’s more critical appraisal of Levinas see ‘Five Problems in Levinas’s View of Politics and the Sketch of a Solution to them’ *Political Theory* Vol. 32 No. 2, (April 2004) pp172-185

<sup>239</sup> Critchley, S *The Ethics of Deconstruction: Derrida and Levinas* (Edinburgh; Edinburgh University Library, 1999) p214

<sup>240</sup> Simmons W.P *Anarchy and Justice: an Introduction to Emmanuel Levinas’ Political Thought* (Lanham, Oxford Lexington, 2003) p73; Hughes, C ‘The primacy of ethics: Hobbes and Levinas’ *Continental Philosophy Review* 31 (1998) pp79–94

which in effect is always the passage anew from the other to the third person.<sup>241</sup> There is in addition the work of the legal theorist Manderson who is perhaps most successful at demonstrating Levinas' ethics in action. Ethics in Levinas can be applied, according to Manderson, as a determinate principal within jurisprudence particularly in the realm of tort law. Such an application would involve the extension of the 'duty of care' within civil law, rendering it as inalienable as obligations within the realm of criminal law. This would involve a rethinking of the parameters of civil law, traditionally founded on the principal of autonomy, insofar as it would underwrite it with a notion of obligation beyond that which one freely accepts in entering into contractual relations.<sup>242</sup> Also worthy of note here is the work of Diamantides who sees in Levinas, in particular in the earlier thematics on 'nausea' and 'escape', the basis for a humanism capable of engaging with the anti-humanist implications of the likes of Agamben's concept of bio-politics.<sup>243</sup>

For those who hold to the 'correlation' or 'translation' thesis we observed earlier in this work, one of the most tangible ways in which 'Jerusalem' is to offer a corrective to 'Athens' is in this passage from the other to the third. For Burggraeve, for example, the 'prophetic' justice according to which Levinas' work is structured is a direct translation of the biblical tradition of the prophets who would challenge and rebuke the king directly as well as people, not in clandestine or revolutionary fashion but openly, in order to remind the state that it is founded on the law of the Torah.<sup>244</sup> Levinas thus would advocate a form of 'permanent revolution'; yet revolution understood in a transformed sense: namely in the sense of the recognition by individuals working within institutions that these institutions are always revisionary. Levinas' establishing of the political realm via the passage from the other to the third allows us to recognise that there is 'always need for a better justice and a greater peace', and that the state must never be allowed rigidify, thus forming a totalitarian system.<sup>245</sup> Rolland and Gibbs focus in parallel fashion on the manner in which Levinas' theorizing of the political re-orientates the 'Greek', the 'Greek' enterprise of politics as well as philosophy, a process in which the 'Hebrew' critiques and yet in the same process rehabilitates in qualified

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<sup>241</sup> Derrida, *Adieu* p115

<sup>242</sup> Manderson, D *Proximity, Levinas, and the Soul of Law* (Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006); see in particular chapter 6: 'From Philosophy to Law' p73 - 97

<sup>243</sup> See Diamantides, M 'From Escape to Hostage' in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* ed. by Horowitz, A and Horowitz, G (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006) pp191-220 and 'Levinas and Critical Legal Thought: Imbroglia, Opera Buffa, Divine Comedy?' in *Levinas, Law, Politics* ed. by Diamantides, M (Oxon, Routledge, 2007) pp179-216

<sup>244</sup> Burggraeve, R *The Wisdom of Love in the Service of Love: Emmanuel Levinas on Justice, Peace and Human Rights* (Milwaukee, Marquette University Press, 2002) p146

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid* p150/51

form certain aspects of the latter necessary in coming to terms with the complexities of the situation that the ‘third party’ represents.<sup>246</sup> Meir similarly gives a concise summary of what the dynamic between ‘Athens’ and Jerusalem would represent, contrasting Athens, where politics is based on presence and clarity, to Jerusalem where politics is rather based on the trace of a disappearance:

‘If Jerusalem is the place where separation is the condition of union, Athens is the place where the polis surges, and the city where all is visible to the light of reason. We are the inheritors of Athens, which represents politics and philosophy. We are linked to Athens, Levinas tells us, yet equally to Jerusalem, where the memory of retreat, of the *tsimtsum* is kept alive, the memory of that which is absent. The unequal, asymmetrical relation, or once more the memory of the absent, prevents the city from becoming a Leviathan who absorbs and devours all.’<sup>247</sup>

Levinas’ theorizing of the political would thus represent the fashion in which the Greek is brought into contact with the Hebrew in order to save the former from its apparently innate tendency to develop into totalitarianism.

On the other hand, a relatively greater number of commentaries of Levinas’ theorizations of the political have tended to regard this aspect of Levinas’ work more negatively. Dussel speaks for many in criticizing Levinas’ de-politizing of the relation with the other, or the fashion in which this relation must always bypass considerations of the social and ethnic properties of the other to his pure otherness, a movement which renders Levinas’ ethics impotent when it comes to political action defined precisely by such considerations.<sup>248</sup> For Bergo the passage from the other to the third in Levinas’ work does not in fact represent a passage, rather the site of a ‘diremption’. With the development of Levinas’ work the utopian other becomes steadily detached from concrete political reality, and the third person representative of non-utopian reality becomes progressively marginalised.<sup>249</sup> Wolff similarly takes issue with the manner in which the relation with the third becomes an ‘after thought’ of what is ultimately a non-political dynamic in Levinas thought: ‘one is led to think that what is at stake in these pages on justice is an elaboration of the final details of a central motif: the

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<sup>246</sup> See Rolland ‘Subjectivité et anarchie’ in *Les Cahiers de la Nuit Surveillée* (Paris, Verdier, 1984) pp176-193 and Gibbs op cit

<sup>247</sup> Meir, E ‘Lévinas: Entre Jérusalem et Athènes’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et Judaïsme* ed. by Cohen-Levinas, D Trigano, S (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp125-142 (pp140/1)

<sup>248</sup> Dussel, E ‘The Politics’ by Levinas: Towards a Critical Political Philosophy in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* ed. by Horowitz, A and Horowitz, G (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006) pp78-98

<sup>249</sup> Bergo, B *Levinas Between Ethics and Politics: For the Beauty that Adorns the Earth* (Kluwer, Academic Publishers, 1999)



original a-political ethical signification.<sup>250</sup> Yet this rendering of the political dimension as an afterthought puts Levinas' somewhat idyllic theorizing of the ethical in peril. Levinas' overriding concern with the isolated individual who takes on universal responsibility in face of the political realm, where it is a question rather of negotiating ambiguities means that Levinas, believes Wolff, is in danger of justifying fanaticism. Caygill directs his critique not simply against Levinas' theorising of the passage from other to third, but against any notion of such a passage in the first place. Caygill is in particular alarmed at the multiple possibilities which Levinas' theory allows for justifying or recognising the unavoidability of political violence, and in particular one form of political violence. Caygill devotes attention namely to the fashion in which Levinas' vision of ethics takes on a rather ambiguous character when faced with the concrete question of the State of Israel and the Palestine-Israel crisis.<sup>251</sup>

Amongst the more critical interpretations of Levinas' presentation of the passage from other to third, there are those who implicate the importance which Levinas gives to the eschatological dimension, either as symptom or indeed as cause of weakness in this area. For Rose, Levinas' messianic orientation is the cause: Levinas, along with the likes of Derrida, represents an example of 'messianic deconstruction' characterised essentially by the refusal of all possibility of compromise and mediation between the realms of ethics and politics, one which simply confronts reality as it stands with an abstract utopia. Levinas concerns himself entirely with the articulation of the 'sublime other', incapable of providing criteria for action or reform and thus ultimately leaving institutions as they stand to their own inertia.<sup>252</sup> For Vanni, as we have seen, messianism is likewise the cause: the eschatological exalting or distancing of the other causes it to register irredeemably outside the field of practical engagement: 'it concerns a sole subject, isolated or elected by an affect which lifts it entirely out of praxis, the eschatological appeal to an otherworldly responsibility.'<sup>253</sup> In close proximity to Rose, the other as eschatological calls too far from outside totality, allowing no possibility of mediation between the two realms. For Asher Horowitz, on the other hand, messianism is a symptom. His argument is nonetheless likewise similar to that of Rose. Horowitz objects namely to Levinas' formulation of the passage from the other to the third insofar as, he argues, it is rounded off too prematurely and as a result remains at a purely abstract level: 'to think that unending critique by itself marks the end (either the goal or the

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<sup>250</sup> Wolff, E *De l'Ethique à la Justice: Langage et Politique dans la philosophie de Lévinas* (Dordrecht, Springer, 2007) pp339-40

<sup>251</sup> Caygill, H *Levinas and the Political* (London : Routledge, 2002) pp191-192

<sup>252</sup> Rose, *The Broken Middle: Out of Our Ancient Society* (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1992) pp250-310

<sup>253</sup> Vanni, *Impatience des réponses* p128

limit of both) is already to have abandoned the critique one is ostensibly espousing.’<sup>254</sup> Levinas contents himself merely with observing the fashion in which the ethical relation with the other is a constant reminder to the political realm of its own inadequacy. The relation with the other cannot serve as the means of determinately and constructively critiquing the totality in concrete, historical reality. Rather, the other is to function merely as critique for the third by virtue of its radical separation from it. This impasse also determines the character of messianism in Levinas: ‘the relationship of ontology to ethics simply as critique is every bit “the fixed and permanent state of affairs” that Levinas sees as the “danger of eschatology,” when the *eschaton* is thought to be, à la Hegelian dialectics, a “finite fusion” with the infinite. Paradoxically to accept the finality of the paradox that keeps the situation open, is to close the situation.’<sup>255</sup> Levinas’ ethics of the eschatological relation precisely loses its critical power insofar as it is an eschatology which stands at a constant distance from the realm of history and politics and thus risks forming a stable equilibrium, which would be essentially a closed system or a new totality, with this realm which it is to stand over against. Gad Horowitz substantively agrees, emphasising how the distance which Levinas’ eschatological relation takes from historical reality has as counter-effect the rendering of injustice also as a fixed ahistorical necessity.<sup>256</sup> In variation, Dussel attributes the weakness of Levinas’ political theory to the weakness of his eschatological theory, holding up the early Christian vision of eschatology as one more able to straddle the divide between the prophetic/detached and political/engaged attitudes.<sup>257</sup>

These critiques, when placed next to the more positive appraisals just cited, mark out the ground of a possible debate. Rather than take sides in such a debate, however, we would like to shift the ground of the question. Despite the unquestionable validity of such critiques, critiques with which any Levinasian engagement with the political domain would have to engage, we would like to ask whether they are orientated towards a notion of the political with which Levinas is not himself primarily concerned. We shall need to reconstruct Levinas’ notion of the political and the passage from other to third. As point of departure, we should note a certain paradox or quandary in Levinas’ theorisation of the passage from ethics to justice. On the one hand, there is a consensus among commentators that Levinas’ philosophy

<sup>254</sup> Horowitz, A *Ethics at a Standstill: History and Subjectivity in Levinas and the Frankfurt School* (Pittsburgh, Duquesne University Press, 2008) p34-5

<sup>255</sup> Ibid p35

<sup>256</sup> Horowitz, G ‘Aporia and Messiah in Levinas and Derrida’ in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* ed. by Horowitz, A and Horowitz, G (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006) pp307-331

<sup>257</sup> Dussel, E ‘The Politics’ by Levinas: Towards a Critical Political Philosophy in *Difficult Justice: Commentaries on Levinas and Politics* ed. by Horowitz, A and Horowitz, G (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2006) pp78-98

evinces from the outset a political concern. 'The problem that mandates his ethics is precisely *the political*', argues Weitzman, 'thus not only is Levinas's apparently apolitical and depoliticized ethics evidently motivated from its inception by a profound historical situatedness and political concern, but, even more, it has the political as its very primary justification and ultimate goal.'<sup>258</sup> It is worth recalling that both *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* all open with the question of the 'third party', with a consideration of the political and economical realm, and are framed as a research into the conditions or criteria by which to judge this realm. Critchley, concurring with Weitzman, writes the following: 'I would . . . claim that, for Levinas ethics is ethical for the sake of politics – that is, for the sake of a new conception of the organisation of political space.'<sup>259</sup> By paying greater attention to how the contingent layer of face to face relations informs the structural, political layer, argues Critchley, Levinas formulates ethics precisely in view and for the sake of politics. If Levinas' ethic is not capable the translation into meaningful political significance, then all Levinas' efforts would be according to their own rationality in vain. Derrida in somewhat different fashion demonstrates the same point. He highlights the 'non-deducibility' of the political from the ethical in Levinas' work. There is no architectonical or genetic relation between ethics and politics, Derrida notes; there is rather a 'leap without transition', a 'mutation'.<sup>260</sup> Derrida has in mind here Levinas' own description in *Totality and Infinity* that in the 'face of the other' signifies already 'all humanity'. The other is already the third: politics for Levinas is not derived from ethics; ethics rather juts into politics and politics into justice. On the one hand, there is at each moment a 'leap' from the ethical situation, which arises ever anew in the face of another into the political and juridical realm; on the other hand, there is no protocol, system of rules or programme for action which can be carried from one decision to the next. Ethics as Levinas formulates it is already a question of politics, as politics always falls back into ethics. The relation with the other can never be considered apart from the relation with the third. Alternatively, the relation with the third is 'already inscribed' and already imposes itself, as Rolland puts it, in the relation with the other.<sup>261</sup>

On the other hand, despite this orientation of Levinas' thought towards the political from the outset, there is also widespread consensus that Levinas' theory of the 'third party' remains underdeveloped. Bergo focuses on how the lack of transition between the other and the third

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<sup>258</sup> Weitzman, E 'Necessary Interruption: Traces of the Political in Levinas' Theory and Event Vol11 No2 (2008)pp76-98

<sup>259</sup> Critchley, Ethics of Deconstruction p223

<sup>260</sup> Derrida, Adieu p64

<sup>261</sup> Rolland, Anarchie et Justice p190

betrays the *absence* of any viable political theory at work in Levinas. It betrays a lack of transferability: the political dimension in Levinas' work for Bergo, in other words, remains somewhat unintelligible; 'the world or being in Levinas is never quite concrete' Bergo writes.<sup>262</sup> With the evolution of Levinas' thought this problem, argues Bergo, becomes progressively more acute. In searching for the point of pure exposure to the other, Levinas enters more and more into the closed interiority of the subject. The appeal to the theological notion of 'grace' in *Otherwise than Being* is indicative for Bergo of the abdication of any attempt to then derive phenomenologically the concreteness of the public realm from the abstract character of the relation with the other which Levinas furnishes from within this closed realm.<sup>263</sup>

Caygill's critique likewise amounts to the observation that Levinas has not fully registered the exigency of engaging with the question of the relation with the third on its own account. The manner in which Levinas was able at points to ignore the existence of the Palestinian as neighbour alongside the Jew Caygill attributes not simply to Levinas' biographical conditions but to the very structure of the passage from the other to the third which serves as theoretical basis for Levinas' political theory. The separating of the other and third from the outset, Caygill argues, effects a distancing of the other from the third and allows a prioritising of the former, one's 'people and kin' over the latter. There is a structural weakness, argues Caygill, to Levinas' ethics. 'Does the 'I', Caygill asks 'have a direct responsibility for the 'third', equivalent to its responsibility for the other, or is its responsibility for the 'third' delegated through the other's direct responsibility for the third as its other? Levinas appears to sanction only the second position . . . This restriction determines the set of possible alliances between 'I', 'other' and 'third', and, as already seen , rules out the possibility of an alliance between the I and the third against the other.'<sup>264</sup> Caygill's argument is that, due to the hierarchy which Levinas constructs between the other and the third, one in which the relation with the third is conceived as an inevitable 'degeneration' of the relation with the other, Levinas' account is exposed to possible contaminations. The possibility of marginalizing one neighbour in face of another remains as something of a bug in the Levinasian system. By virtue of the very fact that Levinas attempts to derive the relation with the 'third person' from the relation with the other, Levinas is already not doing sufficient justice to it.

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<sup>262</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p289

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid* p189

<sup>264</sup> Caygill, *Levinas and the Political* p132/3

The puzzling aspect or paradox we have here is that Levinas' work is informed from the start by the exigency which the 'relation with the third' poses, and yet appears to never sufficiently recognize either the specific intelligibility or exigency of this relation. Wolff's work is exemplary in that it registers both sides of the paradox. Wolff considers how both the relation with the other and the third would be transformed if the equally primordial character of the relation with the third, an equality which Levinas himself admits, were to be taken in full seriousness. 'If the third person is an other and if there are always at least three people, how is it possible to bracket the third. How is it possible for Lévinas to speak of an initial duo which becomes trio? From where arises the third if it was always already there?'<sup>265</sup> If inherent to the meaning of the other person is its contradiction with the third person, the priority of the question of the other over that of the third requires readjusting. Yet the question of the third remains in Levinas an afterthought, despite the fact that it is the very exigency of the question of the third, the question of the 'possibility of justice' that Levinas takes as his point of departure.<sup>266</sup> It is thus a matter of deep inconsistency for Levinas that 'the dominant theme is the question of the origin of ethical intelligibility' and that 'few pages are devoted to the analysis of justice.' Levinas would mislead us into thinking that he is not in any serious way concerned with the dimension of justice or politics: 'One is led to think that what is at stake in these pages on justice is an elaboration of the final details of a central motif: the original a-political ethical signification.'<sup>267</sup>

That is, Wolff along with the majority of other writers considers this paradox as being a symptom of inconsistency; we would view it otherwise. Rather than an inconsistency we would like to see in it a paradox indicative of a certain hidden logic at work. The question of 'justice' or of the 'third' in Levinas is central in Levinas work, and yet is represented by Levinas as an unproblematic supplement or addendum to the question of the relation with the other. How is this possible? The question of the relation with the third can become an afterthought only if this question is *already implicitly resolved* in the posing of the question of the relation with the other. The question of the other in effect must already be implicitly the question of the third. If Levinas is responding to the question of 'the third' from the start, however, then evidently he is not answering the same question which is only subsequently posed as the question of the third. For Horowitz 'the betrayal of ethics in politics', he argues,

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<sup>265</sup> Wolff *De l'Ethique à la Justice* p346-7 and thus 'the phenomenology of the singular other would be rendered impossible'. Levinas' formulation thus, in the eyes of Wolff, requires readjusting: the priority in the relation between the other and the third which we have seen at work in Levinas should be transformed rather into 'reciprocity' between the two.

<sup>266</sup> *Ibid* p348/9

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid* p339-40

‘is not a resolution of the problem. It is the problem itself.’<sup>268</sup> Yet it is nonetheless *for Levinas* the resolution of the problem. The question as such is: the resolution to what problem? The difficulty here is envisaging how the articulation of the relation with what is cast as the individual and utterly unique other can already as to essentials resolve the question of comportment within and towards society as a whole. It is, we will now demonstrate, precisely the messianic logic of the relation with the other which accomplishes such a resolution. It is perhaps the case that the messianic figure of the Master in *Totality and Infinity* follows the common logic which Mack identifies as at work in the diversity of messianic archetypes of the Second Temple period: the logic namely of providing certain *social* ‘ideals’ of ideal types. ‘That the ideals were cast as singular figures’, argues Mack, ‘does not hinder their function as symbols for a social order.’<sup>269</sup>

It is worth noting that the anteriority or priority of the question of the relation with the other to that of the third should not at all be taken as given in Levinas’ work. In this context the essay *Ego and Totality*, which in many ways set the agenda for *Totality and Infinity*, is illuminating. This essay *begins* namely with the question of ‘injustice’, or as Levinas names it the relation with the ‘third’, *before* tackling the question of the relation with the other. The basic condition of society is here one of ‘injustice’ insofar as the force which ‘institutes history’ and determines the character of society is that of ‘ontological alienation’. (EN39) The beginning of society is that in which ‘a free being can take hold of another free being.’ (EN38) Society is instituted in the process in which ‘foreign wills’ seek to take hold over the very freedom of the other. We have here something of a master-slave dialectic as the motivating force behind history, stripped as it also is in Sartre of any abstract notion of *Anerkennung*. The clash of two heterogeneous desires leads not to the destruction of one by the other, but of the taking hold of the freedom of one by the other, diverting this freedom towards the dimension of *work*. This is the ‘original injustice’ upon which society is formed, a dynamic however imposed not simply by one individual upon another but reciprocally and indeed by all individuals upon each other. Henceforth society is no longer simply the immediate clash of individual warring wills and the struggle for mastery, but the struggle for the possession of the works of others in society: ‘Thanks to this injustice, people form a totality around the works over which they mutually dispute.’ (EN39) The free work of the free individual, once placed in the totality, takes on new, alien significations which deform the

<sup>268</sup> Horowitz, *Ethics at a Standstill* (2008) p33

<sup>269</sup> Mack, B ‘Wisdom Makes a Difference: Alternatives to Messianic Configurations’ in *Judaisms and their Messiahs at the Turn of the Christian Era* ed. by Neusner, J, Green, W, Frerichs, E (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1987) pp15-48 (p20)

original intentions of this individual, deviations undergone by the work of all free individuals by the work of all other individuals, insofar as still embodying the primordial antagonism to one another. These deviations caused by one individual upon another, and all individuals upon all others, produce an entity apart from them all: they produce namely a 'destiny' which is alien to all individuals and yet which rusefully takes hold of the freedom of all. This destiny, *history*, produced from primordial antagonism, defines society as '*totality*'. Injustice thus becomes the general condition in society in which the 'impersonal and self-coherent discourse . . . destroys the singularity and the life of spiritual beings.' (EN27) What is the name given to this condition? 'The totality constitutes itself thanks to the other as third' writes Levinas 'what meaning could freedom have therefore for the third, injustice and totality to be possible?' (EN38) 'The third', in other words, is the name given to this primordial condition of injustice in history.

The third here signifies as a very different relation from that to be found in *Totality and Infinity*. The third signifies in this text, a text in proximity in Levinas' career to *Totality and Infinity*, as the primordial *injustice* of society: the passage from the individual's original and inalienable freedom towards a society in which individuals are under the sway of alien and impersonal necessities. It is only *subsequent to* and *on the basis of* this consideration that the relation with the other is then considered in this essay. How can injustice, Levinas asks, be recognized as injustice if it is both universal and original? 'Injustice is not ipso facto recognized as injustice. There exists, in the very sphere of history, a realm of innocent injustice where evil takes place in naivety. (EN41) As such injustice, or the relation with the third, which is the *original* state of society, can only become injustice if something else is added to it which allows injustice to be recognized as such. Levinas explains further: 'For me to know my injustice – for me to glimpse the possibility of justice – a new situation is necessary.' (il faut une situation nouvelle).' (EN41) This *new situation* is precisely the relation with the face of the other, with the one who 'holds me to account'. (EN41) From here we are presented with the relation with the other as interlocutor in identical fashion to the presentation this relation receives in *Totality and Infinity*.

The relation with the other enters as 'new', establishing a passage *from* the third *to* the other. It is significant that when as such the relation with the third is considered *before* the advent of the relation with the other, the relation with the third becomes the question of *injustice*. In *Totality and Infinity*, where the question of the relation with the third comes *after* that of the relation with the other, the relation with the third becomes the question of *justice*. There is in other words a mutation in the question of the third in Levinas, a mutation which

the posing of the question of the other effects. The question of the third mutates from being a question of injustice to a question of justice, a mutation which is already a *resolution* of the question of the third. Rather than attempting to answer the question of the third as the question of justice, that is, we should attempt rather to see the manner in which the posing of the question of justice is already the resolution of a more fundamental question. This is where the real problem which Levinas identifies as the question of 'the third' lies.

The eschatological dimension, we noted, is tied to the question of judgement, in particular to an articulation of the conditions of possibility of judgement. We also noted, however, that far from rendering judgement possible it indeed appears to render it impossible. Yet there are always two acts involved in judgement: before the judging of injustice, there must be the *separation*, the *setting apart*, of justice from injustice, the 'sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff' etc. What in fact becomes secondary in Levinas is not judgement as such, but rather the second act of judgement. The question of how to judge the inhuman by virtue of the human, injustice by virtue of justice, takes on a secondary character, the character indeed of an afterthought, in face of the more primary question of judgment: the question namely of establishing that there *is* a difference between the human and the inhuman, justice and injustice. Levinas' work exhausts itself in this first act of judgement, essentially that of distinguishing, or *separating* the *sanctus* of the human.

This dynamic, and the reason why *Totality and Infinity* exhausts itself in this dynamic, is indicated once more in *Ego and Totality*: 'in order that I know my injustice – in order that I glimpse the possibility of justice – a new situation is required.' The act of *recognising* injustice, that which is first on the scene, is one with the *glimpsing* of justice beyond it. Yet it is not simply a question of a 'beyond'. The French original conveys more clearly the importance of this phrase: 'Pour que je sache mon injustice – pour que j'entrevoie la possibilité de la justice . . .' What is the 'between', the 'entre' of the voir', across which justice is glimpsed? It is precisely *injustice*. By injustice, we should recall, is signified the primordial antagonism in society which resolves itself into the more orderly dispute over works from which an alien destiny weaves itself from the liberty of individuals. Justice is to be glimpsed not only beyond but *through* this injustice; injustice is to be rendered porous or *translucent* allowing a relation of justice to shine through it. It is only as such that injustice can be recognized as injustice. Yet at the same time, as translucent injustice becomes *one* with the justice which radiates it through it. Thus the problem of the distinguishing of the two is merely raised to a second order. This does not matter, however, in the moment in which injustice is rendered translucent, *neutralized*. The question of justice is the question of seeing



through injustice, rendering it translucent, rendering injustice *as* justice, as the *noema* of a *noesis* which is *always already* the *noema* of a *neosis*. Before there is a passage from the other to the third, there is this passage from the third to the other, or the passage in which the relation with the other renders the relation with the third translucent. As such, it is evident how there could be no further act of judgment. ‘It is hard’ Caygill argues ‘to see that there is the importance that Levinas claims in the distinction between the state that proceeds from ‘a war of all against all, or from the irreducible responsibility of the one for the all.’<sup>270</sup> We would respond that in Levinas the sanctification of the human is not the means but the end: the *sanctus* of the human is one with the *act* of its *sanctification* or refining.

In the last chapter, we noted how messianism in Levinas was attached to the value of a primordial ‘straightforwardness’. In the *translucency* of injustice we are coming closer to function in *Totality and Infinity* of such ‘straightforwardness’. In the last chapter we also pitted the value of straightforwardness against the postmodern value of difference in itself. The value of difference in itself in Levinas, we noted, is tied to the metaphysical logic of the opposition ‘Totality-Infinity’. The value of ‘straightforwardness’, however, is not ultimately tied to a metaphysical logic. The messianic function of straightforwardness in Levinas’ text, and the logic according to which it functions, we shall now determine.

### Messianism, Straightforwardness and Intelligibility

We are looking for the most fundamental layer of the question of the third. The relation with the other serves as basis to judge the relation ‘totality’, to recall, insofar as within it opens the horizon of ‘eschatological peace’. When it is a question of enacting this judgement, we have seen, it is the consensus of a number of scholars that Levinas’ work falls into contradiction. Their interpretation follows the explicit thematic of *Totality and Infinity* in which this ‘peace’ is the result of the appeal of the face in its ‘pure expression’ interpolating the ego, an appeal which calls to self-questioning and responsibility, an appeal whose expression signifies most primordially the command ‘thou shalt not kill’.(TI198) The face of the other, Levinas tell us elsewhere, is in itself is the embodiment of a certain ethics or an ‘ethical resistance’: an ethics which is not primordially a *discourse* but which the *experience* of the other *embodies*.<sup>271</sup> The question of the third then becomes the question of how to apply

<sup>270</sup> Caygill, Levinas and the Political p142

<sup>271</sup> In ‘Philosophy and the Idea of Infinity’ CP57-70 (54); also CP59 ‘a face is pure experience, conceptless experience.’

this ethics, in the political realm: how to translate this peace from the *interpersonal* realm into the realm of the function of *institutions*. It is in this translation that Levinas falls into confusion and contradiction. Yet we have noted that many of Levinas' key terms are metaphors with a displaced meaning, and peace is one of these metaphors. 'Peace' in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, beyond its literal sense, represents a metaphor for the situation in which individuals 'can speak rather than lending their lips to an anonymous utterance of history.' 'Peace' Levinas tells us 'is produced as this aptitude for speech.' (TI23) Peace is a metaphor for the possibility of 'speech'.<sup>272</sup> Speech would be impossible in face of the impersonal Hegelian ruse in which the language of reason weaves its design through speakers unbeknownst to them, in which reason rusefully diverts the speech and intentions of individuals towards its own alien destiny with a life of its own. 'Peace' is connected to the problem of speech because the ruse of this alien destiny produces itself via the primordial antagonism of individuals towards each other: due to their reciprocal negation, we observed, individuals themselves produce this alien destiny. What we underlined in the last chapter was that this messianic 'peace', a 'place of refuge' or eddy in the flow of this destiny, is in *Totality and Infinity* tied in particular to the translation of the rabbinic master-disciple dialectic, a relation here in somewhat problematic apposition to the master-slave dialectic implied in this 'ruse'. Rather than consider this peace as connected par excellence to the 'ethical resistance' to totality which the 'the stranger, the widow, the orphan' embodies, as Dussler among others does for example, we should focus on the more specifically *messianic* and phenomenologically more *primordial* character of the 'teaching' which the other as 'master' embodies. The function that this anthropology takes on in *Totality and Infinity*, we noted, is in its embodiment of the value of 'straightforwardness'. It is in this connection of 'peace', 'the possibility of speech' and 'straightforwardness' gathered around the translation of the master-disciple relation that the most fundamental level in the question of the third in Levinas reveals itself.

Straightforwardness first takes on significance within a metaphysical problematic which subsequently takes the form of a sociological problematic. The metaphysical problematic relates to a certain application of Cartesian doubt. Levinas speaks of the '*equivocation*' of the world as it appears to the ego considered apart from the relation with the other, thus silent, detached and relating to the world as if to a spectacle: 'a world absolutely silent . . . would be

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<sup>272</sup> Richter, S 'Language and Eschatology in the Work of Emmanuel Levinas' *Shofar: an Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* Vol26, No4 (Summer 2008) pp132-153 emphasizes the aspect of speech in Levinas' eschatology.

an-archic, without a principle, without beginning. Thought would strike nothing substantial. On first contact the phenomenon would degrade into appearance and in this sense would remain under equivocation, under suspicion of an evil genius.’ (TI90) The pure ‘spectacle’ which Levinas refers to here is the light of intuition cast upon the world by the transcendental ego as understood by Husserl. The world of pure spectacle, of transcendental intuition, where objects present themselves to pure vision, either that of ‘sensible experience or mathematical experience’, cannot be trusted. It can always be subject to Descartes’ ‘universal doubt’. All objects which present themselves thus to vision in the form of *noema* appear to conceal themselves in their very apparition, appear to conceal themselves in the ‘spectacle’ which they make of themselves: ‘already the primordial or the ultimate abandons the very skin in which it shone in its nudity, as a covering that announces, dissimulates, imitates, or deforms it.’ (TI90) The silent apparition of the world of objects, the apparition to a detached ego, would be no more than a circus performance arranged by an ‘evil genius’ to fool us. The real as it is presented to us as a world of facts has no *substance* to it. In the lightness and indetermination of the series of noema which constitute its spectacle it remains something of a game, a trick played on us. It could indeed be a trick played on us *by* the other, an other figure of alterity as such in *Totality and Infinity*, from behind the scenes, whose laughter reaches us through the very equivocation of the spectacle: ‘the silent world is a world that comes to us from an other, be he an evil genius’. (TI91)

It is in this context that the sincerity and straightforwardness of the other comes into play. Rather than the ‘evil genius’ staying behind the scenes, the other as master vouches himself for the signs which he presents to us in speech: ‘speech consists in the Other coming to the assistance of the sign given forth, attending his own manifestation in signs, redressing the equivocal by his attendance’. (TI91) Alongside the content of what is said, the other presents himself in inalienable sincerity in the very act of expression, vouching for the veracity of the content via the primordial frankness which the face already expresses before any words are uttered. Within this frankness is carried a whole layer of phenomenological meaning, that namely of *objectivity*: ‘to receive the given is already to receive it as taught – as an expression of the other.’ (TI92) The ‘teaching’ of the other is what introduces the dimension of objectivity to the world, the possibility of substance and of signification to the anarchic and indeterminate play of mere facts. For Husserl of course, as the *existence* of the world signifies most primordially as the ‘at hand’ of the world to the individual subject, so the dimension of the *objectivity* of the world signifies primordially as the possibility of inter-subjective agreement as to this existence. Levinas, however, critiques Husserl for his portrayal of the

seamless transition from one dimension to the next, insofar as Husserl's transition assumes the birth of signification in intuition, in the intuitive presence of the givenness of an object, rather than in language which takes objectivity beyond the light cast by intuition and the direct intuitive satisfaction of the transcendental ego. (TI95) The inter-subjective dimension, and thus objectivity, is not simply the transcendental synergy of intuitional horizons but the abrupt introduction from outside, via 'teaching', of the dimension of signification and language, a dimension which cannot be derived from the horizon of the ego, silent in itself, and the light of intuition which it casts upon the world.

We might add, however, that this renders the relation with the other in absolute 'frankness' as the very reason for equivocation: it is the introduction of signification via the 'speech' of the other which takes the meaning of objects beyond direct intuitive presence, and thus first creates the very dimension of a 'behind the scenes' from which the 'evil genius' acts. 'Apparition is a congealed form from which someone has withdrawn.' (TI98) Apparition, the 'silent spectacle' of the world of facts already presupposes the birth of signification via the upsurge of language in the face of the other. There is no appearance at all, of a noema signifying *as* the noema of a noesis, which does not already presuppose the dimension of signification and thus the withdrawal from appearance, from intuition, of the source of its truth. The other *equivocally* takes turns, that is, at playing the teacher in 'absolute frankness' presenting himself in 'speech' and introducing the self to this dimension, and at playing subsequently the 'evil genius' who withdraws from speech to his world behind the scenes of the now silent spectacle. The question indeed remains open therefore whether in this process of 'withdrawal into secrecy' the 'evil genius' is not also the other as 'feminine'. Worth considering is the structural proximity of the feminine to the 'evil genius' in Levinas work, and indeed thus the structural link between the other as master, as feminine, and as evil genius in the form of something of a *continuum*.<sup>273</sup> It all comes down to a question of extent: the other as master is present and is 'straightforward'; the feminine is the 'equivocal' other as partially withdrawn; the evil genius is the chronically 'equivocal' other as fully withdrawn. The 'straightforwardness' of the other which is to come to the rescue in face of the problem of 'equivocality' is, in other words, rendered thoroughly 'equivocal' in the process.

Whatever the case the 'frankness' of the other remains apparently inalienable, since without the frankness of the expression of the other, of the upsurge of language which it embodies, neither truth nor deceit nor signification in any form would be possible. The

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<sup>273</sup> Our suspicions concerning the relation between the 'feminine' and the 'evil genius' would seem to be confirmed in (SS93) where the feminine is in essence implicated in 'witchcraft' and 'sorcery'

phenomenological *border crossing* or *initiation* into intelligibility as such requires such a 'straightforwardness' - what in Levinas becomes the self's initiation into language, in place of scripture, by the other as master. Levinas subsequently effects a transition from the metaphysical to the sociological:

Speech is thus the origin of all signification – of tools and of human works – for through it the referential system from which every signification arises receives the very principle of its functioning, its key. Language is not one modality of symbolism; every symbolism refers already to its language.'(TI98)

The 'algorithmic expression' of all things, tools and works, insofar as taking on signification by virtue of their place in a configuration *relative* to others, this *indirectness* of all reality, refers to the more original *directness* of expression, in which the face is always 'present'. It is here that we have the function of the straightforwardness of the relation with the master. Levinas' target here is principally the Heidegger of *Being and Time*, for whom signification first courses the *Umwelt* of the chain of things as tools at hand before becoming predicative signification via the extraction of objects from this course - a genesis of signification effectuated without reference, that is, to the 'teaching' of the other which comes from outside the closed and silent economy of the self. That this metaphysical vision has wider sociological scope, however, is revealed later. The indirectness of the symbolism of all forms of language which is to be made to refer to the directness of expression is applied in a different context, namely in our relation with others in society:

The *who* involved in activity is not expressed in the activity, is not *present*, does not attend his own manifestation, but is simply signified in it by a sign in a system of signs, that is, as a being who is manifested precisely as absent from his manifestation: a manifestation in the absence of being – a phenomenon. When we understand man on the basis of his works he is more surprised than understood. His life and his labour mask him. As symbols they call for interpretation. Here phenomenality does not simply designate a relativity of knowledge, but *a mode of being* where nothing is ultimate, where everything is a sign, a present which absenting itself from its presence and in this sense a dream . . . The same is not the Absolute; its reality expressed in its work is absent from its work. In its economic existence its reality is not total. (TII78)

'Economic existence' is not to be considered 'total'; and this despite the fact that the metaphysical relation with the other was earlier to reveal itself in its full plenitude precisely in economic existence. This is because economic existence here betrays the same logic which Levinas earlier applied to the 'silent spectacle' of the 'anarchic world of facts'. The

metaphysical logic of the game of the other as ‘evil genius’ is translated into the economic logic of relations with others in society.<sup>274</sup> In their economic existence, other people as encountered across the works which they produce, these others are as absent from the presentation they make of themselves to society as is the evil genius behind the appearance of the world. They present themselves only ‘phenomenally’, as pure spectacle that is, without any substance and ‘where everything is a sign’. Individuals in such a society become as such enigmatic symbols. More accurately they become a *series* of symbols to each other. Individuals are understood only by virtue of the objects that they use or transform, and whatever titles, positions in society, needs, interests, obligations, institutional affiliations, pastimes, norms, stereotypes, prejudices, *meconnaissances* accrue to such activity.

In light of the latter the individual is understood as ‘what’ rather than as ‘who’: he is understood, that is, as belonging to a particular class, as fulfilling a certain functional role, as in possession of or lacking certain privileges, *relative* to others in society. This relativity is in fact the principal concern: ‘when we understand man on the basis of his works he is more surprised than understood. His life and his labour mask him. As symbols they call for interpretation.’ The dimension of labour introduces a world of symbols in society which ‘call for interpretation’, in other words the relation with the other via the dimension of work signifies the inescapability of hermeneutics. Our understanding of others always requires a *detour*, a detour through the whole of society in order to decipher the symbols by which they present themselves to us as a social spectacle. Any individual in society insofar as a series of symbols can be understood only via *the relation* of this individual and his symbols relative to those of others in society – one’s role in relation to what function it fulfils for others, one’s position in society relative to others’ positions. The intelligibility of our relation with other individuals under such conditions requires the hermeneutical detour through society as a whole: ‘the author of a work, approached from the work, will be present only as a content. This content can not be detached from the context, from the system in which the works are themselves integrated, and it answers to the question by virtue of its place in the system.’ (TI177) In our relations with others in society there is always a detour, we are always deflected from the particular other before us who in himself/herself remains *unintelligible*.

This problem of the *indirectness* or *unintelligibility* of the relation with the other, it should be noted, is one with the question of *injustice* in society. The question of the hermeneutical detour through society as a whole is a question of the relation with the third posed, however,

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<sup>274</sup> This connection, here implicit, is stated most explicitly in another context: ‘Nothing is any longer identical with itself. Sorcery is precisely this: ‘the modern world’ . . . all speech is magic breath.’ (SS107)

as the question of the possibility of the relation with the other or of a 'direct' relation, which is to say directly 'intelligible' or 'face to face' relation. The opening passage of *Totality and Infinity* on Being as war is an extension of the Ego and Totality's consideration of ontological alienation in society as arising from a primordial antagonism, of the 'primordial injustice' which the relation with the third originally signifies. Underlying this account of the dimension of work as the inescapability of hermeneutics, as the presence of structural '*equivocation*' in society, is likewise this notion of 'ontological alienation' forming the principle concern of *Ego and Totality*:

The lines of meaning traced in matter by activity are immediately charged with equivocations, as though action, in pursuing its design, were without regard for exteriority without attention. In undertaking what I willed I realized so many things I did not will: the work rises in the midst of the waste of labour. The worker does not hold in his hands all the threads of his own action. He is exteriorized by acts that are already in a sense abortive. If his work delivers signs they have to be deciphered without his assistance. If he participates in this deciphering, he speaks. Thus the product of labour is not an alienable possession, and it can be usurped by the other. Works have a destiny independent of the I, are integrated in an ensemble of works.' (TI176)

Behind the hermeneutical detour through society, the labour of the ego 'integrated into an ensemble of works' is the same 'destiny' of *Ego and Totality* which takes on its own independence via its ruseful subversion of the will of individuals for ends alien to this will. In such a society I do not have the ability to comprehend my own work nor relate authentically to the other whose works 'like my own, are delivered over to the anonymous field of the economic life.' (TI176) The totality, which in the preface to *Totality and Infinity* revealed itself in all its virulence as war, here reveals itself once more in subdued fashion as the anonymous economic order in which war remains implicit in the 'dispute over works'. What the hermeneutical *detour* betrays therefore, for Levinas, is the *ruse* of the 'alien destiny' of society as it works its way through all individuals, insofar as the relations between individuals across the dimension of work embodies a primordial antagonism which society realises in the form of theodicy.

The question of the third, the question of society as a whole, that is, is first and foremost a question of how to engage with this apparently necessary hermeneutical detour through society as a whole, society's ruse. The relation with the other is a *response* to this question. 'Contemporary philosophy and sociology have the tendency of underestimating the direct social relation between people who speak, preferring the silences or complex relations

determined by the general forms of civilization – mores, law, culture.’ (HS207) The relation with the other as master across the Oral Torah, or language, the primordial ‘*straightforwardness*’ which it embodies, derives its exigency from the manner in which it counters the need for the hermeneutical *detour* through society imposed in the relation with others across the dimension of work. The hermeneutical relation with others is essentially that of relation with society as a whole, the *ruse* of this society accomplished through relations between individuals, set against precisely these ‘direct’ relations between individuals. It is a question of the relation with the ‘third’. At work here is the glimpsing of ‘justice’ through ‘injustice’ the relation with the other *through* the relation with the third, of directness *through* indirectness. The logic of hermeneutical indirectness is to be *short-circuited* via another ‘eschatological’ logic of *directness*. Justice is to be glimpsed through injustice, and injustice as such is to be judged, if what is understood by judgement here is ‘*deciphering*’. (TI182) It is considered as such that the relation with the other already responds and implicitly resolves the problematic of the relation with the third party.

With what concept of society or totality is Levinas working in formulating the question of the third as such? Despite the repost to structuralism evident in Levinas’ rejection of ‘sociology, linguistics, psychology etc’, the question of the relation with the third as the question of ‘totality’, *Totality and Infinity* is perhaps most suitably viewed in light of the tradition defined by the overriding concern with the concept of totality, that namely of western Marxism. It was Korsch who set the agenda for western Marxism in his critique of the widespread Marxist tendency of dismissing philosophical speculation, of considering all philosophy as superseded by the ‘socialist science’ of revolutionary praxis. To neglect philosophy is to lose sight of the global perspective, Korsch argues, leading to specialized investigations within fragmented disciplines or merely localised critique or reform, to losing sight of the revolutionary transformation of the whole. Philosophy, according to Korsch, is the thought of this *whole*, of the *totality*: as such it is essential and cannot be reduced to the status of ideology. A Marxist philosophy is required which understands the interconnection of the different domains of society - economic, political, legal, intellectual, cultural, religious – articulating these domains and their cohesion in a manner which is not crudely economically reductionist.<sup>275</sup> In his own formulation of the concept of totality, Levinas for his part demonstrates solidarity particularly with the existential branch of western Marxism, especially evident in his appropriation in the notion of ‘ontological alienation’ of Kojève’s Hegel in

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<sup>275</sup> Korsch, K *Marxism and Philosophy* (London, New Left Books, 1970)



order to articulate social injustice on the basis of a foundational and perdurable liberty. Levinas' concept of totality indeed shows a particular proximity to Sartre's later existentially inflected Marxism, a fact which we shall consider below.

*Totality and Infinity* can in effect be seen to stand between two concepts of totality. Set against the postmodern attempt to *rescue* singularity from totality, a totality which conceals heterogeneity behind its homogeneity, there is the western Marxist notion of totality which rather seeks to *decode* or *decipher* the totality in terms of relations between individuals, decoding society into 'direct' relations between individuals which constitute it via concepts such as alienation, fetishism, reification etc. The problem for the latter notion of totality is not simply the concealed belonging of the totality to relations between individuals, but also the concealed belonging of these individuals to the totality. It is concerned with the apparent gulf between these two aspects of society. On the one hand, society presents itself as a set of 'reified' class relations and institutions which appear as ends in themselves and as intelligible in themselves; on the other hand, individuals in their own isolated, existence are confronted with these institutions as if by natural forces. These *natural* forces appear detached from the existence of individuals, who as isolated are unable to perceive the fashion in which these forces are *social*: or the product of their own praxis in concert with other individuals in society. The goal of such a critique of society is to render evident the implicit belonging of totality to individual and individual to totality. The goal is namely the transparency, translucence, or *straightforwardness* of the relation of totality to individuality, of one individual to the next individual, and of individuality to totality.

The different notions of totality, the postmodern and western Marxist, in fact produce decidedly different normative standards concerning the principle of exteriority. According to the postmodern relation to exteriority which the likes of Kosky and Schroeder read into Levinas, Levinas' notion of alterity becomes an example of post-Nietzschean metaphysics, in which exteriority is considered a value in itself. Such metaphysics can content itself in charting the trajectory in which exteriority precisely *exceeds* the horizon of totality.<sup>276</sup> On the contrary, for the notion of totality held to by western Marxism this trajectory constitutes the

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<sup>276</sup> Lyotard's critique of capitalism in *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1996) p181 is a good example of the postmodern turn in the concept of totality: 'the only insurmountable obstacle that the hegemony of the economic genre comes up against is the heterogeneity of phrase regimes and of genres of discourse. This is because there is not 'language' and 'Being' but occurrences. The obstacle does not depend upon the "will" of human beings in one sense or in another, but upon the differend.' Lyotard pit, that us, the richness of the pure heterogeneity of the regimes involved in different phrase utterances or language 'events', in which 'incommensurability opens between one phrase and the next' against the 'necessary' and homogenising linking of phrases imposed by capitalism in which all such events are reduced to the intelligibility of time expended as quantifiable resource.

very problematic: set against the trajectory of the *exceeding* of the totality by individuality is, in particular for the existentialist Marxist, the trajectory of the *receding* of particularity, or more specifically the principle of interiority, from society as the sum of alienated relations and the alien necessities which spawn from them. In light of this, it is worth re-examining the following passage from *Totality and Infinity*:

When we understand man on the basis of his works he is more surprised than understood. His life and his labour mark him. As symbols they call for interpretation. Here phenomenality does not designate a relativity of knowledge, but a mode of being where nothing is ultimate, where everything is a sign, a present absenting itself from its present and in this sense a dream. (TI178)

Levinas' problem here is the fashion in which, like the evil genius from the world of phenomenon, the worker *absents* himself from the 'signs' through which he is present in society. The worker is the site of a flight or exodus from society, the site from which one can view the principle of interiority in its trajectory of *recession*: 'apparition is a congealed form from which someone has withdrawn.' (TI98) Against this, it is the face of the other which 'presents itself', represents indeed an 'absolute presence', vouches for the signs which it gives: 'speech consists in the Other coming to the assistance of the sign given forth, attending his own manifestation in signs, redressing the equivocal by his attendance'. (TI91) The worker is the other as *absent*, or in the mode of absenting himself; the face is the other as *present*.

On the one hand, we should recall the following continuum: the other who is withdrawing is tainted with the 'equivocality' of the 'feminine', and the other who has utterly withdrawn is the 'evil genius'. On the other hand, the face of the other as the advent of 'absolute difference' is elsewhere in *Totality and Infinity* precisely the one who '*absolves* himself' from all relation, comprehension, presence, totality: 'Separation opens up between terms that are absolute and yet in relation, that absolve themselves from the relation they maintain, that do not abdicate in it in favour of a totality this relation would sketch out.' (TI77) Levinas' text is the point of confusion, that is, between two models of totality and thus two models of alterity. What at one moment is a problematic, the receding of alterity, becomes the next moment a virtue in itself, the exceeding of alterity. All that can be said about the relation of these two models of alterity, remaining in a state of confusion in Levinas' text, is that the receding of alterity must be *managed* before it can become the exceeding of alterity. We should understand the correlation of the face and the idea of the infinite in *Totality and Infinity* not

simply as a means of *charting* the infinite alterity or trajectory in which the other absolves himself from all relation, but also as a means of managing it. It is a means of *catching up* with it, and it is this catching up which defines the *messianic* character of the relation: ‘the presence of a being not entering into, but overflowing the sphere of the same determines its “status” as infinite. This overflowing is to be distinguished from the image of liquid overflowing a vessel, because this overflowing presence is effectuated as a position *in face of* the same.’ (TI195/6) The *eschatological* relation with the other in effect represents the messianic catching up with or managing of the infinite *recession of interiority*, and as such is the *basis* upon which the metaphysical, postmodern relation with the other, or the affirmation of the infinite *exceeding of exteriority* can then be articulated.

The question of totality as the non-intelligibility of society in Lukacs, or of society as ‘second nature’, is a good point of departure for bringing out this dynamic in Levinas’ work. The following is Lukacs’ famous definition of ‘second nature’ from *Theory of the Novel*.

This second nature is not so dumb, sensuous and yet senseless like the first: it is a complex of senses – meanings – which has become rigid and strange, and which no longer awakens interiority; it is a charnel-house of long-dead interiorities; this second nature could only be brought to life – if this was possible – by the metaphysical act of re-awakening the souls which, in an early or ideal existence, created or preserved it; it can never be animated by another interiority.<sup>277</sup>

This notion of society as a ‘second nature’ develops on Lukacs’ engagement with the world of convention in the German dramatist Storm in an earlier work *Soul and Form* and paves the way for theory of reification as developed in *History and Class Consciousness*. As in the earliest of these works, the concern is with the ossification of the conventions of liberal society into a form of unquestionable fate, an end in itself. Society, which takes as point of departure the transformation of nature from its original and given state ultimately results in a second nature of conventions as inflexible and as unintelligible as was this hypothesised natural state. It represents a society which has cut itself off from the dimension of ‘interiority’, or the needs and desires of the members of society which the social transformation of nature was to serve.

In the concept of reification Lukacs takes this critique of the ‘second nature’ of liberal convention into Marxist terrain, fusing Weber’s analysis of rationalisation with Marx’s critique of commodity fetishism. Lamented is the destruction of ‘organic’ and ‘direct’ relations

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<sup>277</sup> Lukacs, G *The theory of the novel: a historico-philosophical essay on the forms of great epic literature* (London; Merlin Press; Cambridge, Mass., M.I.T. Press 1971) p64

between subjects and to nature in community organized production with the onslaught of 'mechanized' relations in which individuals are reduced analytically to isolated, abstract atoms within an over-arching rationalized work process. The same logic for relations within factory production applies to relation within society as a whole, in which individuals relate across isolated acts of exchange within the overall, impersonal calculus of supply and demand. Society as such has become reified: it has become an impersonal mechanism or calculus with a life of its own; set against the lives of individuals which it itself produces in the manner of things as isolated atoms. Society has become one in which 'the relations between men . . . as well as the relations between men and the objects that should really gratify their needs, have faded to the point where they can be neither recognized nor even perceived.'<sup>278</sup> It *appears* no longer either to be question of 'relations between men' or of the gratification of their 'needs', but rather governed by rationalisation as an end in itself and a fate imposed upon individuals.

Despite the heightened impersonal or quasi-natural character which society takes on, Lukacs argues, a *key* to the humanistic intelligibility of society can nonetheless still be found. This key is commodity fetishism. Commodity fetishism represents the illusion that exchange value is a quality of commodities and their relation to each other rather than the expression of the relation between subjects across their labour which it 'really' is. It is the illusion of what is essentially subjective taking on the facade of objectivity. It is only once the illusion of the objective character of labour takes hold, that labour can be regarded as an abstract force to be analytically dissected into its component parts into which individuals are slotted. It is only once the illusion takes hold in which a relation between subjects comes to appear as a relation between things that society can be reduced to the rationalized calculus governing the relation between things as commodities, which in turn renders individuals in this society as things or as atoms to be slotted into the analytically fragmented division of labour. In other words, the society of 'direct' 'relations between men' has not disappeared but rather is only 'hidden in the immediate commodity relation'.<sup>279</sup> This 'hidden' humanism allows Lukacs to map onto this Marx-Weber matrix the Hegelian project of overcoming the Kantian dualism between transcendental subject and the world of objects. Reification signifies the 'Kantian' objective, impersonal social world which *appears* to be separate from subjectivity. The subject and object of society can, however, be seen to be the same thing: it is only the illusion of commodity fetishization which allows society to take on the contrary dualistic appearance.

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid p93

<sup>279</sup> Ibid

For Lukacs it was the proletariat, whose labour was the source of all exchange value, which embodied the concealed identity underlying society objectified and rendered impersonal. It was via the standpoint of the proletariat that access could be gained to, as Lukacs put it, the '*living core*' behind the mechanism of rationalised production and calculus of exchange which society has become: 'beneath the cloak of the thing lay a relation between men, that beneath the quantifying crust there was a qualitative living core.'<sup>280</sup> The proletariat holds the *key* to the interpretation of society. It is via the proletariat that society operating apparently at the height of impersonality and mechanization can nonetheless be decoded in terms of the 'living core' of praxis and the 'direct' 'relations between men' it apparently still implies.

The question of totality is here a question of what is *social* about society. It is Adorno's formulation of this question as the problem of 'second nature' which demonstrates most fully in what sense Levinas' formulation of messianism can be understood as a response to it. Lukacs' notion of 'second nature' is concerned with the *opaque* character of society. Second nature for Lukacs concerns a society which is no longer comprehensible in terms of the individuals who relate together within it, from the needs and desires of these individuals, including the need they have for each another. Society still depends in 'hidden' fashion on relations between individuals: it was created and is implicitly ever *recreated* by relations between individuals. Yet society as it stands *obscures* this fact, presents itself as an existence in itself apart from these relations, as that which rather *occasions* these relations. As an epiphenomenal layer it nonetheless imposes a layer of meanings upon this most primordial layer. The following represents Adorno's appraisal of Lukacs' concept of second nature:

'The framework of the concept of second nature, as Lukacs uses it, is modelled on a general historic-philosophical image of a meaningful and a meaningless world (an immediate world and an alienated world of commodities) and he attempts to present this alienated world. He calls this world of things created by man, yet lost to him, the world of convention.'<sup>281</sup>

We have here a faithful reflection of Lukacs: second nature is understood as a series of conventions once more both meaningful, in the sense of understood and lived via participation in society, and meaningless, in the sense of *unintelligible* in terms of any substantive human ends and *indecipherable* in terms of their production via direct relations between individuals in society. Adorno, under the influence of Benjamin, then begins to take this concept onto new territory:

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<sup>280</sup> Ibid p169

<sup>281</sup> Adorno, TW 'The Idea of Natural History' *Telos* 60 (1984) pp111-24 (p117)

This fact of a world of convention as it is historically produced, this world of estranged things that cannot be decoded but encounters us as ciphers, is the starting point of the question with which I am concerned here. From the perspective of the philosophy of history the problem of natural history presents itself in the first place as the question of how it is possible to know and interpret this alienated, reified, dead world.<sup>282</sup>

We have here the 'starting point' for Adorno's philosophy: second nature becomes the notion of society as a world of alienated things envisioned as '*ciphers*' 'requiring interpretation.' We have in the problematic of society as the problem of a 'world of ciphers' requiring interpretation, in other words, the same problematic found in Levinas of society as an anarchic world of 'symbols' and the hermeneutical detour they necessitate.

Levinas' work, we noted, stands between two notions of totality. Adorno as such represents an especially suitable interlocutor insofar as in his concept of totality strongly brings out the crisis in the western Marxist project of deciphering in which Levinas still has one foot.<sup>283</sup> What Benjamin and Scholem formulate as the question of the possibility of the interpretation of Scripture, Adorno effectively transports to the question of the interpretation of society as the problem of *unintelligibility*.<sup>284</sup> The idea of unintelligibility as understood by Marx refers to the manner in which individuals are assigned to a private, self-interested existence, and are thus unable to perceive the 'real' social dynamic which underlies and consigns them to this existence.<sup>285</sup> Adorno, however, pursues Marx's own analysis to the point of rendering it a critique of Marx. For Adorno, there is no longer any 'real' underlying dynamic: neither production nor anything else can serve as base. If production itself takes place in society only for the sake of the creation of exchange value, if objects are produced only to be exchanged, if production follows exclusively the end of the continual expansion of capital as exchange value for its own sake, then in no way can production anymore be considered as underlying exchange and as such stand as key for the collaborative and direct layer of society which exchange between private individuals obscures. This is what takes Adorno definitively

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<sup>282</sup> Ibid

<sup>283</sup> Jay, M *Marxism and Totality: the Adventure of a Concept from Lukacs to Habermas* (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1984) p242: 'Adorno's expressions of belief in the possibility of normative totality were the most tenuous of all western Marxists.'

<sup>284</sup> We are referring here to the Scholem-Benjamin debate in *The Correspondence of Walter Benjamin and Gershom Scholem 1932-1940* (New York, Schocken Books, 1989) over the status of a Scripture to which, with the break in continuity with tradition effectuated by modernity, alongside the dilemma which emancipation and assimilation represent, the key to the interpretation has been lost.

<sup>285</sup> Marx, K *Capital: A Critical Analysis of Capitalist Production, vol 1*; (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1974) p116

beyond Lukacs: the exchange principle no longer obscures underlying sociality but has become its very principle. What the problem of unintelligibility signifies for Adorno is that, as for Scholem and Benjamin we have lost the key to the interpretation of scripture, so for Adorno *we have lost the key* to the interpretation of society. The exchange principle for Adorno represents a formalistic language, self-enclosed and self-referential whose signs are us and our labour, a language which cannot be decoded in terms of any other. Society governed by the exchange principle has no beginning or end other than itself and thus remains *unintelligible, undecipherable* in terms of any human language or in terms of any substantive human ends. The fact that we have lost the interpretive key to society as a whole means in addition that we have lost the key to the interpretation of each of our relations with others in society. Each of our relations with others in society becomes as unintelligible as the whole to which they belong. The question of the relation with the third and the relation with the other as such belong together; they are indeed the *same* question.

Levinas on more than one occasion in *Totality and Infinity* gives an appraisal of society which could have been extracted from Lukacs or Adorno with little modification:

The other person and I function as elements of an ideal calculus, receiving from this calculation their real being and confronting each other under the sway of ideal necessities which cross over them from all sides. They play the role of moments of a system and not as origin . . . In the reign of ends where people define themselves, indeed, as wills, but where the will defines itself as that which allows itself to be led by the universal. (TI217)

Society becomes a question of *calculus*: of the balance or *proportion* between individuals considered in abstract, formally identical terms, governed by the purely formalistic and quantitative principle of exchange, under the sway of the necessities imposed by the fluctuations in value within the ‘anonymous’ and quasi-natural marketplace. In following the hermeneutical detour through the various symbols by which individuals present themselves, we do not arrive at the intelligibility of these relations; we rather reach another entirely alien intelligibility which negates the former:

Expression is not produced as the manifestation of an intelligible form that would connect terms to one another so as to establish, across distance, the assemblage of parts in a totality, in which the terms joined up already derive their meaning from the situation created by their community, which, in its turn, owes its meaning to the terms combined. This “circle of understanding” is not the primordial event of the logic of being. Expression precedes these coordinating effects visible to a third party. (TI201)

The question of the third party here signifies precisely as the *intelligibility* of society conceived in purely *formal* and mathematical terms, which is to say, *substantively* in terms of the *unintelligibility* of society.

This indicates to us in what way the question of the third in Levinas must be reconstructed according to its most original sense: the question of the third is not at the outset the question of the institutional *application* to society as a whole of Levinas' ethical vision; it is rather in the first place the question of the *intelligibility* of this society as a whole. Once we recognise this question as Levinas' principal or at least prior question in *Totality and Infinity*, the efficacy of his solution, the relation of 'eschatological peace' as metaphor for the 'possibility of speech', can be appreciated. The relation with the other responds to and resolves from the outset the relation with the third: the problematic of second nature or of the unintelligibility of society imposes for Adorno an *imperative* - namely that of *relocating the key* to its interpretation. The means must be found for deciphering society, for *resurrecting* the 'charnel house of long-dead interiorities' which lies dormant under society conceived as an anarchy of 'symbols', 'ciphers' or 'enigmas': 'the reference to the charnel house includes the element of the cipher . . . everything must mean something, just what, however, must first be extracted.' It is in terms of this imperative that we should likewise understand the function of messianism in *Totality and Infinity*. The 'straightforwardness', 'frankness', 'sincerity' etc of the face in Levinas are once more metaphors: they are metaphors, that is, for *intelligibility*. They are the ciphers for the intelligibility *in itself* of the 'direct' level of relations between one individual and the next, and thus the intelligibility of society as a whole. The relation with the other is messianic insofar as represents the privileged *key* by which society *as a whole* is deciphered. In the world of the 'anarchy of facts', where all phenomena show themselves and conceal themselves at the same time, we are saved from equivocation, from unintelligibility in society, because of the presence of the other:

A proposition is maintained in the outstretched field of questions and answers. A proposition is a sign which is already interpreted, which provides its own key. The presence of the interpretive key in the sign is to be interpreted is precisely the presence of him who can come to the assistance of his discourse, the teaching quality of all speech. Oral discourse is the plenitude of all discourse. (TI96)

The face of the other is the 'presence of the interpretive key' to all 'equivocation', to all unintelligibility in society. The face of the other is the presence of the 'interpretive key' to society because it 'provides its own key' to its own interpretation. The face expresses *itself*,



and thus is not a sign which needs to be *deciphered* in terms of other signs: ‘the condition for theoretical truth and error is the word of the other, his expression, which every lie already presupposes. But the first content of expression is expression itself.’ (TI51) Because it need not be deciphered in terms of any other sign, but can decipher itself, it can then serve as basis for deciphering *all* other signs in society. It can serve as basis, in other words, for deciphering the relation with the third: ‘the metaphysical relation of the I with the other moves into the form of the We.’ (TI300) Through the relation with the other, in other words, society *as a whole*, the relation with the third, is *deciphered* as ‘We’. The face is absolutely ‘straightforward’ and ‘sincere’ because the expression of the face, the face as the phenomenological cipher for pure expression, expresses nothing but itself: as intelligible in terms of itself it can render *all* other things intelligible in terms of itself. ‘The other’, writes Levinas, is ‘the *prime intelligible*’. (TI293)

We can see here, in other words, both in what sense the relation with the other already resolves the question of the relation with the third and at the same time the specific logic which governs messianism in *Totality and Infinity* set against or underlying any metaphysical postmodern logic. What is at stake in *Totality and Infinity* is not first and foremost the inalienable character of difference or non-identity of the other from totality, but the other as the presence of that within the totality which can decipher itself and thus serves as the basis for deciphering *all* that which cannot decipher itself in the totality or the ‘anarchic’ world of symbols. What is required is an ‘order where all the symbolisms are deciphered by beings that present themselves absolutely, that express themselves.’ (TI178) The privilege of the face is not its exteriority, its withdrawal, but the fact that it ‘presents itself absolutely’, an ‘absolute presence’ on the basis of which all social signs are deciphered. The face represents the ‘return to univocal being from the world of signs and symbols’, and the ‘unfailing source of ever renewed deciphering.’ (TI182) The goal in *Totality and Infinity* is not first and foremost an ‘escape’ from Totality, but its rendering *intelligible* in terms of a single sign. As opposed to a metaphysical logic, the most suitable name for the logic of the face as resolution of the question of the third, or society as a whole, would be *totemic*. The dynamic which governs *Totality and Infinity* is that whereby the other is *set apart* from within the ‘anarchic’ field of signs by virtue of its self-presentation. The primary opposition in *Totality and Infinity* is not ultimately that of Totality versus Infinity but of the world of signs versus the face as *privileged* sign, the face as *set apart* from within the world of signs: ‘The presence of the face, or expression, is not to be ranked among other meaningful manifestations.’ (TI297) This opposition and the logic which governs it is totemic: the face is set apart from within the

world of signs as a privileged sign, as self-interpreting sign, and as such becomes the key through which to interpret all signs in society. The face as totemic has a different function from the face as metaphysical. The face as metaphysical is the site where the other partakes of the glory of the infinite ever *exceeding* any attempt to grasp it; the face as totemic, as privileged self-interpreting sign, is the site where the infinite *receding* of the principle of interiority from society is *stopped up* insofar as its trajectory of recession can be assigned to, and thus traced from, a privileged sign. Before becoming metaphysical, the ‘height’ of the other is a totemic ‘height’; it is ‘messianism’ which negotiates the transition from one to the next.

### Messianism, Sanctification, Fetishisation

Levinas’ eschatology is an eschatology of ‘straightforwardness’, an apocalypse in the sense of a pure *revealing*. Alternatively it is apocalyptic insofar as it is an eschatology of pure *directness*, a *short-circuiting* of the hermeneutical detour which imposes indirectness and its own layer of meanings on interpersonal relations. Levinas’ eschatological relation represents the key to the uncovering, revealing, deciphering of the apparently inalienable humanistic core of society: the ‘charnel house of long dead interiorities’. Judgement in Levinas is a metaphor for deciphering. ‘Justice’ does not judge ‘injustice’ in Levinas: justice *deciphers* injustice in terms of itself. The indirectness of the hermeneutical detour of the ruse of reason is deciphered in terms of directness, the relation with the third in terms of the relation with the other. Levinas does not judge injustice, but rather contents himself with *separating*, with distilling, the impure mixture of justice and injustice in a society of relations with the third – or with others as thirds. This is accomplished via the ‘face’ of the other, a privileged sign separated from other signs, set apart so as to be able to perform this function. The face allows the purity of the other to be *glimpsed through* the impurity of the third. The face is the privileged or totemic sign through which society as a whole in its unintelligibility is rendered intelligible, the third rendered intelligible, translucent, in terms of the other.

A question immediately suggests itself: how ‘straightforward’ is this ‘straightforwardness’? What is at work in this apparently self-evident ‘primordial frankness’ through which society becomes in one fell blow intelligible, we observed, is a certain anthropology freebooted within phenomenological discourse as primordial: the other is the ‘teacher’ and expression is the ‘teaching quality’ of all speech. The other is the master who *initiates* the self into language via ‘conversation’, or ‘the question and answer’ of oral

discourse, as the master initiates into Scripture across the discourse of the Oral Torah. Expression, Levinas tells us in *Totality and Infinity*, represents the ‘plenitude of all discourse’. (TI96) That is, it represents the *scriptural* level of all discourse, of all language. Here is this ‘plenitude’ once more expressed in more directly theological terms within a collection of Levinas’ Talmudic writings: ‘God’s Torah is expressed – according to the Talmudic doctors - in the language of human beings, while in that same Torah, within the obvious meaning of pure information, there is included a semantics that is absolute, inexhaustible, ever renewable through exegesis.’ (TN112) This plenitude, which becomes ‘frankness’, ‘straightforwardness’ in Levinas’ philosophy, is here presented as the meaning of something which is conveyed in the act of exegesis beyond information or content. This divine semantics is not mediated through the content of Scripture but *expresses* itself through the content in an *immediate* fashion: ‘according to these same learned doctors, nothing is worse for a believer than to make a distinction, in the Pentateuch, between the “Mosaic” and the “divine”: so strong is the principle according to which the prophetic intervention of Moses is the concreteness of the Revelation without mediation.’ (TN112) Underlying the ‘frankness’ and ‘straightforwardness’ of the expression of the other, in other words, is a certain metaphysics of the divine potency or fecundity of scripture: ‘A dead language to be resuscitated, in order that its innumerable intentions may be reawakened! The latent birth of Scripture, of the book, of literature, and an appeal to exegesis, an appeal to the sages who solicit texts, a solicitation of solicitation – Revelation. An appeal to the Talmud and to the infinite renewal of the word of God in commentary, and commentary on commentary. ‘ (TN112) In the same way that the divine *reveals* itself from generation to generation in ever renewed fashion *across* Scripture via the ever continued efforts of interpretations, so the other *expresses* himself *across* a language ever renewed with each speech act in society. The infinite and perpetual renewal of *scripture* via oral discourse becomes ‘expression’ as the infinite renewal of *language* across the anthropology of the master-disciple relation.

In reducing the divine semantics of Scripture to oral ‘plenitude’ with *Totality and Infinity* Levinas seeks to convey the eschatological relation solely by means of the anthropology erected on the basis of this semantics. The initiation into the divine semantics underlying the content of Scripture becomes the initiation into the dimension of intelligibility as such underlying all information giving in language set against the primordial silent horizon of transcendental intuition. The divine fecundity of scripture is not named and slips out of view. Revelation in its immediateness across Scripture becomes the ‘straightforwardness’ of the face of the other across the world of symbols. What substantive difference, is there, however,

between the dimension of ‘intelligibility as such’, the ‘plenitude’ of all discourse, the dimension of ‘primordial straightforwardness’ underlying all content in language, and the ‘divine semantics’ underlying scriptural content which echoes here behind the scenes?

We are not in a position to answer such a theological question. All that we have to say on this point is that the analogy between the dimension of ‘intelligibility as such’ taken phenomenologically and the ‘divine semantics’ inscribed in the Torah does not take place simply by virtue of the exploitation of a structural similarity between two heterogeneous domains: this analogy is rendered possible already by virtue of Levinas’ very vision of Scripture and Revelation. Due to his insistence on rigorous and sober intellectual study of the Torah, and the dialectic which occurs across it between master and disciple, Levinas repeatedly distances his vision of the relation with the other trends within the history of the Jewish religion. Judaism becomes study ‘considered valid as association, as covenant, as sociality with God – with his will, which, though not incarnate, is inscribed in the Torah. (TN120) The relation with God is ‘inscribed’ in the Torah. Thus Levinas remains suspicious of the mystical relation with God outside the text in the likes of *Hekhalot* mysticism or of the Hassidic variety from which Buber drew inspiration for his I-Thou relation. Likewise is rejected Scholem’s Cabbalistic apocalypticism, the ‘breath of fresh air into the well ordered house of Judaism’, from which notions such as the Frankist transgression of the law for the sake of its fulfilment takes its inspiration. The spiritual life of Judaism is the life of the text and the life of the law and thus inseparable from them. Trigano, however, recognises Levinas’ idiosyncratic stance towards the question of Scripture. Unlike other Jewish philosophers, he argues, Levinas in no way concerns himself with the ‘obstacles’ to and ‘intellectual obligations’ in rendering Scripture as source for the construction of a rigorous and systematic philosophy: ‘The cardinal issue for the Jewish philosopher is that he must start to think with a text, the book of Moses.’<sup>286</sup> For Levinas however ‘the question of Scripture is taken as already resolved. It in no way constitutes a problem.’<sup>287</sup> This is because the text of Scripture becomes for Levinas less the site of a *revealed content* to be philosophically negotiated than the simple means through which *pure* revelation takes place as divine self-expression: ‘the text becomes the occasion for a crossing towards the “otherwise than text”’. His thought is in no way a rationalising commentary or interpretation.’<sup>288</sup> ‘Obstacles’ are already bypassed,

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<sup>286</sup> Trigano, S ‘Levinas et le projet de la philosophie juive’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et Judaïsme* ed. by Cohen-Levinas, D Trigano, S (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp145-178 (p166)

<sup>287</sup> Ibid p167

<sup>288</sup> Ibid p168

interpretation or commentary already crossed over, whether it be in the exegesis of text or the hermeneutical detour of society.

If Scripture appears in *Totality and Infinity* shorn of all content, that is, allowing the anthropology based on it to appear self-standing, this is because for Levinas, both as Jew and philosopher, although inscribed historically in a specific text, *Scripture was never fixed to any specific content*. Levinas' formulation of primordial 'straightforwardness' thus has more in common than he would admit with Scholem's 'mystical linguistic theories' of the Cabbala with their elaboration of the 'divine potency' at the heart of language, in which scripture is seen as the embodiment of the 'divine essence' of language in general. For the Cabbalists as for Levinas revelation becomes less a question of revealed content than an acoustic process: God is 'heard' through human language<sup>289</sup>. Levinas' view of the 'divine semantics' of Scripture is not so far from the Cabbalists vision of Scripture and *by extension* language as the vehicle by which the divine 'Breath' or 'Pneuma' expresses itself. Likewise for the Cabbalists this divine Breath expresses itself in language not in order to impart any kind of information, but simply in order to express itself. Language is understood as having a non-communicable source which is none other than that of its own self-manifestation<sup>290</sup>. The equating of the Torah with the Breath or Name of God thus for the Cabbalists signifies that its purpose is not the conveying of any particular message, but simply the giving *expression* to God's creative potency in pure form within language.<sup>291</sup> It is worth noting indeed that when Derrida comes to the question of 'straightforwardness' in Levinas' work, his articulation of it is made via audible appeal to Benjamin's metaphysics of divine language drawn from Scholem.<sup>292</sup>

In understanding in what sense this recourse to a certain metaphysics of language is concerned with the sanctification of the human, in what sense the sanctification of the human *necessitates* this recourse, a comparison with western Marxist sources is once more suitable, specifically with the humanistic metaphysics which undergirds these. Adorno betrays this humanistic metaphysics on a number of occasions. It is evident, for example, in his polemic against the 'positivistic' reduction of sociology to natural science methodology. Society cannot be reduced entirely to quantification and objectification, argues Adorno, since society 'is made up of human subjects and is constituted through their functional connection' and

<sup>289</sup>Scholem, G 'The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala (1)' *Diogenes* 79 (1979) pp50-80 (p59)

<sup>290</sup>*Ibid* p72

<sup>291</sup>*Ibid* p 76

<sup>292</sup> Derrida, *In this Work* p18. The echo namely of Benjamin's Adamic language the reminiscence of which all translation from one language to another takes place is here audible: 'Another text, the text of the other, arrives in silence with a more or less regular cadence, without ever appearing in its original language, to dislodge the language of the translation.'

is to this extent irreducible.<sup>293</sup> Adorno still anchors himself, that is, to the underlying humanism of historical materialism, what Schmidt calls Marx's 'negative ontology': although there is no essential, unalterable concept of man to which humanism could appeal, it is 'man' who creates and recreates himself in society with each historical epoch.<sup>294</sup> Adorno's normative basis remains tied to the perspective that society is at base a relation between 'human subjects', however much these subjects are objectified and the relations between them reified by the society they themselves create. However overbearing the totality which society becomes, society *as* society must still in some sense be reducible to this metaphysical humanistic basis. Behind the quasi-natural, ossified appearance which society takes on there must still be a *living core* of subjectivity or inter-subjectivity, of *direct* relations between individuals, even though this living core can never be *extracted* from the historical and social conditions which obscure it. Underlying the Weber-Marx/Hegel-Kant matrix in Lukacs is ultimately an organistic metaphysics derived from Rousseau: 'nature becomes the repository of all these inner tendencies opposing the growth of mechanization, dehumanization, reification.'<sup>295</sup> Adorno considers this Rousseauian metaphysics and the notion of 'organic' relations between individuals derived from it as an example of naivety.<sup>296</sup> 'The question of man . . . is ideological because its pure form dictates the invariant of the possible answer.'<sup>297</sup> This 'ideology' is the point, however, to which this negative ontology inevitably leads. It is only as such that Adorno can state the following: 'this totality . . . is itself mere appearance. The ossified institutions, the relations of production, are not absolute Being, but man-made and revocable, however powerful they may be.'<sup>298</sup> How can one consider reified 'thing-like' institutions to be 'man-made' without the formalistically 'invariant' notion of 'man' in mind? Without this residual humanistic metaphysics as normative basis, not only would there not be any possibility of issue from the totality as it stands, Adorno would not even be able to allow himself the possibility of the critique of this totality. There must always be a unique, inalienable and irreducible intelligibility to relations between individuals in society, a 'living' organic core of society, however residual or mythically abstract it becomes, as means through the 'false' appearance which these relations take on in society can be critiqued and in terms of which they can be deciphered.

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<sup>293</sup> *The Positivist Dispute in German Sociology* (London, Heinemann, 1976) p15

<sup>294</sup> Schmidt, A *The Concept of Nature in Marx* (London, NLB, 1971) p9

<sup>295</sup> Lukacs, *History and Class Consciousness* p135

<sup>296</sup> Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* p191

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid* p51

<sup>298</sup> Adorno, TW *Introduction to Sociology* (Stanford; Stanford University Press, 2000) p162

This 'living core', the expression of it in *positive* terms, is the goal envisaged by the sanctification of the human in *Totality and Infinity*. It is in the essay 'Freedom and Command' that Levinas formulates most explicitly something approaching this 'negative ontology'. Levinas outlines a phenomenology of 'command' in which collective subordination to the impersonal order of society is derived from the direct encounter 'man to man' and the command, i.e. the 'height', which the other in this meeting already inherently embodies. (LC57) This dynamic is implicit throughout *Totality and Infinity*. One might say that the articulating of the *sanctus* of the human in *Totality and Infinity*, the doubling up of humanism as the 'humanity of the human', in which the humanity is set apart from and from within the inhuman, the other set apart from and from within the third, is in essence an attempt to refine the substance of this 'negative ontology' to the point where it can be rendered as positive 'plenitude'. Entirely without appeal to organicist formulations, Levinas articulates the same metaphysics or negative 'ontology' or anthropology via phenomenological means, namely via the metaphysics of expression:

Multiplicity can be produced only if the individuals retain their secrecy, if the relation that unites them into a multiplicity is not visible from the outside but proceeds from one unto the other . . . In order that multiplicity be maintained, the relation proceeding from me to the Other . . . must be stronger than the formal signification of conjunction, to which every relation risks being degraded. (TI251)

Here we have an expression of the 'living core' of society to be set apart from all 'degradation'. Levinas attempts phenomenologically to fix for this living core a *stable* meaning. This phenomenology articulates the dimension of society entirely immanently and dynamically in terms of the dimension of the 'from the one *unto* the other' and so on. Levinas wishes to access directly into the '*secret*' dimension, the living core of society as dynamic or as ever spreading *contagion*.

This living core, Marx's negative ontology, must be expressed in positive terms if it is to be *secured* within itself, set apart from all possibility of corruption. Society loses its intelligibility, Levinas argues, the *sanctus* of the human is *desecrated*, if it is articulated in terms of any synchronic code, of 'psycho-analysis or sociology' etc, even if this be a code which is composing *itself*, or an equation adding *itself* together *dynamically* or *temporally* via this dimension of society as contagion. For the Husserl of *Logical Investigations*, after all, logical or mathematical essences remained essences, remain objective and immune to psychologism, despite the fact that they were articulated temporally, despite the fact that

behind the one *plus* the other via which a logical or mathematical essence is constructed the temporal one *to* the other of its parts at the phenomenological level of its construction works itself out. This possibility within the social realm is inadmissible for Levinas:

The ethical relation, the face to face, also cuts across every relation one could call mystical, where events other than that of the presentation of the original being come to overwhelm or sublimate the pure sincerity of this presentation, where intoxicating equivocations come to enrich the primordial univocity of expression, where discourse becomes incantations as prayer becomes rite and liturgy, where the interlocutors find themselves playing a role in a drama that has begun outside of them. (TI202)

Levinas fuse the Hegelian ruse of reason with the structuralist notion of code articulating itself across and over the heads of the speech occurring between individuals. ‘Discourse’ risks becoming ‘incantation’, speech risks becoming structuralist code, in the same way that the immediacy of the appeal which prayer constitutes risks transforming into the merely repetitive formulas of rite and liturgy. The negative ontology of the human *as* negative ‘risks’ becoming the ossified and reified world of ciphers and symbols. Yet this risk can never fully materialise because the ‘primordial univocity of expression’ is always set against the ‘intoxicating equivocations’ of society as the ‘anarchic’ world of symbols articulating themselves via conversation between individuals. ‘Univocity’ here signifies the self-contained and irreducible intelligibility in itself of the expression of the other which interposes itself between the individuals and the possibility that they are ‘playing a role in a drama that has begun outside of them’. The straightforwardness of expression is *assured* against the ‘equivocality’ of structuralist code in which one voice overlays another.

We noted in the last chapter in what the sense the messianism of the master-disciple relation was equivalent to the *sanctus* of the master-disciple relation as the ‘city of refuge’, the anthropology conducted across the study of Torah as the enclosure of peace set apart from the violence of the world. Here we find in what sense the character of ‘straightforwardness’, ‘frankness’ or ‘sincerity’ which this relation takes on in *Totality and Infinity* carries through this messianism. In effect this relation creates a place of ‘refuge’ for the negative ontology of the human, a place of refuge from the buzz of the diverse, transversal codes with their inscrutable trajectories, a place of refuge from which it need not suffer degradation and from which this *negative* ontology may be expressed positively as ‘plenitude’.

That the articulation of this ‘*straightforwardness*’ of expression as a positive rather than negative value requires the *enigmatic* echoing in the background of a certain divine ‘semantics’ betrays the other dynamic infusing the dynamic of the sanctification of the



human. To be precise, it betrays the dynamic of the fetishisation of the human.<sup>299</sup> It is here that a significant difference emerges, for example, between Levinas and Adorno. We disagree with Plüss for whom Levinas and Adorno form a pair in the articulation of a philosophy in the 'light of redemption'.<sup>300</sup> What must be recognised is the diverging trajectories from the same point of departure. For both Adorno and Levinas the key to the deciphering of society, in terms of the same humanistic metaphysics, has been lost. Yet both thinkers engage with this problematic in decisively different ways.

Adorno's work registers in exemplary fashion, we argued, the crisis in the Marxist strategy of deciphering society. Despite inheriting the vision of society as 'second nature' from Lukacs, passing it through Benjamin, Adorno nonetheless is critical of the humanistic metaphysics which underlies it. This critique is outlined in the preface to *Minima Moralia*:

Our perspective of life has passed into an ideology which conceals the fact that there is life no longer . . . The relation between life and production, which in reality debases the former to an ephemeral appearance of the latter, is totally absurd. Means and ends are inverted. A dim awareness of this perverse quid pro quo has still not been quite eradicated from life. Reduced and degraded essence tenaciously resists the magic that transforms it into a facade. The change in the relations of production themselves depends largely on what takes place in the 'sphere of consumption', the mere reflection of production and the caricature of true life.<sup>301</sup>

Adorno problematises here the Lukacean formulation of the idea of reification. Reification, second nature, the unintelligibility of society, does not simply obscure the 'living core' of society, argues Adorno; it problematises the very notion that society has a living core. Adorno argues here that production governed by the exchange principle must itself always give the *appearance* of being geared towards life, this living core, via being orientated towards consumers whose needs it itself creates; and yet the assuming of this apparent end is in fact still only the means to its own end, the end of the cyclical self-production of capital. The quasi-natural status of the calculus of exchange does not just conceal but displace the 'true' basis of society, 'direct relation between individuals', into a similar status of quasi-real. Lukacs' 'living core', the essence set against the reified facade of society, becomes as much

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<sup>299</sup> Interesting in this context is HN59, in which Levinas discusses the 'eschatology paradoxically endless or precisely infinite' insofar as related to 'never ending study'. This is a study considered as *eschatological* because the text in some sense is the embodiment of the divine: 'A God not incarnate, surely, but somehow inscribed, whose life, or a part of it, is being lived in the letters.' The simple deference to scripture, the openness to ever plumb its infinite depths of meaning, beyond whatever meanings are taken from it, is already an immediate and thus messianic contact with God. Eschatology, that is, signifies here the unmediated in a quite literally *fetishistic* sense: in the sense, that is, that the very materiality of scriptural text takes on its own potency.

<sup>300</sup> Plüss, *Das Messianische* p355

<sup>301</sup> Adorno, TW *Minima Moralia: Reflections on Damaged Life* (London, Suhrkamp Verlag, 1974) p15

appearance and facade as the reverse. Life, which production is supposed to be geared towards, is itself produced as the stunted self-interest of consumerism: life, society's living 'subjective core' itself becomes epiphenomenal. This means equally that neither can the base of praxis nor 'direct' relations between individuals be any longer assumed as more essential to society than the reified laws of exchange for which they were to be the concealed foundation. Adorno takes to its logical conclusion Marx's notion of the 'objective' illusion of commodity fetishism, an illusion objective insofar as given reality in society in the measure in which it governs social relations: once an illusion becomes objective, oscillates between illusion and reality, the 'reality' in face of which is to be an illusion takes on a similar status.

Adorno holds, we observed, to the 'negative ontology' of Marxist humanism that it is ultimately human beings who create and recreate themselves in society with each historical epoch, that society is at base a direct relation between human beings. Adorno undermines nonetheless the normative basis of this humanism, and it is in this undermining that the messianic dimension in Adorno's own work opens. Adorno renders problematic any notion of the 'living subject core' of society as a normative foundation. 'Even so', he writes in a later work 'nothing could be experienced as truly alive if something that transcends life were not promised also.'<sup>302</sup> The 'truly alive' can be experienced only in relation to that which transcends life. The normative foundation to historical materialism, society's 'living core', can be articulated only in terms of that which exceeds or withdraws from life and yet is promised within it. As opposed to critiquing totality on the basis of that which it obscures, Adorno critiques it on the basis of that which as always failed to manifest itself within it. Society for Adorno is to be *deciphered*, in terms of 'everything about history that, from the beginning, has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful'.<sup>303</sup> Society, second nature, is critiqued and deciphered in Adorno in terms of an organistic, natural base which has never existed, or that which in a fallen nature has always consistently failed to exist.

It is in opposition to this vision, or to the denial of its inevitability, that messianism in Levinas is formulated. The eschatological relation with the other is constructed so as to ensure the alienable existence of this normative base however much it withdraws and recedes from society. We should note that the hermeneutical detour of society in Levinas is not deciphered by the face of the other; it is rather *short-circuited*. The problem of non-intelligibility is not really resolved by Levinas; it is rather *deproblematized*. The world of symbols is not decoded by Levinas; it is rather *neutralized*: reduced to static, to background noise. It is his

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<sup>302</sup>Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* p375

<sup>303</sup> Adorno, TW 'The Idea of Natural History' *Telos* 60 (1984) pp111-24 (p120)

eschatology which allows Levinas to achieve this. Unlike Levinas, Adorno allows eschatological hope to enter his work only with the greatest wariness. Perhaps this is the reason: 'The less of life remains, the greater the temptation for our consciousness to take the sparse and abrupt living remnants for the phenomenal absolute'<sup>304</sup> Adorno's object of critique here is principally that of Heidegger and of the existentialists, whose work Adorno believes involves the mere 'transfiguring' of the tatters of life into an absolute in order to conceal its damaged status. The formulations of these thinkers for Adorno are symptomatic of the abstract and ideological character that life has taken on: their work is an attempt to conceal the problematic status which the living core of 'direct relations between human beings' has taken on by transforming it precisely in its abstractness into a quasi-theology. Such transfigurations would most likely be for Adorno exactly where to situate the efforts of Levinas' eschatological relation with the other. The formulation of the face to face relation as the concrete event of the passing of infinity, that is, would be for Adorno likewise a manner of betraying the fact that the face to face relation does not or no longer exists, that it represents the 'tatters' of life reworked into the form of a 'quasi-theology'. Society for Levinas, we noted, is that 'posited in a configuration of wills which concern each other through their works, but who look one another in the face.' (EN18) Adorno however, critiques this 'transfiguring metaphysics of existence' for the manner in which it 'produces an illusion of being alive, an illusion of neighbourliness, as it were, from countenance to countenance.'<sup>305</sup> In the sanctification of the human, messianism is charged not simply with creating a place of 'refuge' for the human, but in creating this from Lukacs' 'charnel house of long dead interiorities'.

We are in agreement with certain elements of Smith's presentation of the relation between Levinas and Adorno. According to Smith, Levinas' work 'preaches a form of dogmatism – albeit a radical and innovative form of dogmatism – to the converted' in its appeal to the transcendence of the other as a means of escaping the 'totality' and the 'instrumental reason' which governs it. For 'a materialist critic like Adorno, however, such an appeal to transcendence and illeity would mark the end of critical thought.' According to Smith, Levinas makes this 'dogmatic' appeal in order to 'cradle' critique in 'transcendental security' whereas for Adorno 'nothing really breaks through instrumental reason'.<sup>306</sup> The relation with the other is to offer transcendental security via the 'the entirely concrete and unmediated'

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<sup>304</sup>Adorno, *Negative Dialectics* p375

<sup>305</sup> Adorno, *Positivist Dispute*, p 82

<sup>306</sup> Smith, *Levinas-Adorno* p199

experience of the other: 'the face comes directly before us free from any obstructions, and this raw experience of the trace of transcendence cannot be blurred or degraded by the influence of institutions upon our perceptions.'<sup>307</sup> For Adorno, on the other hand, nothing escapes mediation: 'Adorno refuses to divorce cognitive habits from the social, historical, cultural, and economic conditions of modernity.'<sup>308</sup> We do not agree with Smith's assessment as to the 'dogmatism' of Levinas' thought. If the mere appeal to transcendence is to be considered dogmatic, then the 'materialism' to which Adorno apparently makes exclusively appeal could equally be so considered. At work here, however, is frankly a slightly bluntly drawn line between transcendence and immanence, a boundary which the work of both Levinas and Adorno render problematic. Smith is nonetheless correct in identifying the principal contention between Levinas and Adorno as focused on this question of 'transcendental security' and on the appeal to the 'unmediated' which guides *Totality and Infinity*. This, we have also argued, is the locus of the eschatological dimension in Levinas' thought.

This appeal is not dogmatic; it is rather *paradoxical*, a paradox which in *Totality and Infinity* goes by the name of '*eschatology*'. We are referring to the paradox namely that *Totality and Infinity* in its complexity is devoted to the effort of constructing a relation with the 'straightforward'. Messianism in Levinas is implicated in the efforts involved in the paradox of *securing*, creating a place of refuge, for transcendental *security*. Levinas' work is in no sense dogmatic but recognizes fully the problematic character of the 'straightforwardness', to the search for which it nonetheless is devoted. There is no consequence of Adorno's 'materialism' which has escaped the attention of Levinas. Levinas' work is in no way naïve. Suspicious of any organicist metaphysics, the likes of which he also sees at work in Merleau-Ponty, there is to be no relation with the other in Levinas which does not begin from alienation: the other as both 'neighbour' and 'stranger' within the horizon of the self. If Levinas' work in its appeal to transcendence is theological, then it represents a theology of alienation grounded on the thoroughly 'concrete' and 'materialistic' social transcendence which the alienated other *as* alienated embodies. Thus is the paradox in Levinas: straightforwardness is to occur across alienation. An authentic relation can only be constructed between two figures which are 'absolutely separate'. Before becoming the very virtue and dignity of the relation with the other, we argued, this absolute separation is negotiated, managed in Levinas' work as a problematic. This absolute separation of the other can only be constructed as the very dignity of the relation with the other only once the other

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid p294

<sup>308</sup> Ibid p299

has been fixed at some point in his trajectory of withdrawal: the other who is withdrawing is tainted with the 'equivocality' of the 'feminine', and the other who has utterly withdrawn is the 'evil genius'. Messianism in *Totality and Infinity* is marked by the paradox of articulating a 'direct' relation with the other which is always in the process of *withdrawing*. In this paradox of an infinitely regressing directness is evident Levinas' appreciation of the problematic character of the humanistic metaphysics which he nonetheless does everything to save. It is only by appeal to eschatological logic that it can thus be saved. Only an eschatological logic could handle the notion of a 'direct' relation with that which is always withdrawing from relation. The question that we need to ask is what has become of this eschatological logic in being mobilized in such a fashion and according to such an end.

### Messianism and Parody

In engaging with this question, a final comparison with another figure from the western Marxist tradition is in order, one who bears a more obvious genealogical proximity to Levinas. Most commentaries on the relation between Levinas and Sartre focus on the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness*.<sup>309</sup> Insofar as messianism is concerned, however, we believe that it is more profitable to consider here the principal work of Sartre's Marxist period, the *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. From an early stage Levinas critiqued Sartre's vision of consciousness in *Being and Nothingness* for not being sufficiently materialistic. (EE45) In his idiosyncratic translation of materialism into phenomenological terms in the likes of *Existence and Existents*, Levinas places his form of existentialism already somewhere between *Being and Nothingness* and the later attempt of the Sartre to articulate the conceptual framework of this work in materialist terms.

Sartre's existential Marxism has for present purposes a distinct advantage: Sartre does not speak of totality, but rather of *totalisation*. More specifically, society for Sartre, to recall, is a perpetual *cycle* of totalisation, detotalisation and retotalisation. The force of detotalisation is that of individual praxis which serves as a permanent force of disintegration: the totality which society establishes at one moment becomes in the next inert materiality to be interiorised and negated determinately, worked on, by the praxis of each individual. Each

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<sup>309</sup> Alternatively there is also the focus, such as in Bedorf, T 'L'ambivalence de la fraternité après Sartre et Lévinas' *Cahiers d'Etudes Lévinassiennes*, 5 (2006) pp11-34 on the second book of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* in order to demonstrate how Levinas is able to detect in a way Sartre is not the ethical pitfalls in notions such as the 'group in fusion'. We focus rather on the first book, one which allows us to articulate the specifically ritual character of Levinas' notion of praxis.

individual represents an interiority constituted essentially by the possibility of free praxis, essentially by the possibility of imposing his own global nexus of meaning on the inert field which totality has become, in the ecstatic projection of his existence towards a future goal. In beginning his consideration of totality, or *totalisation*, from this dimension of interiority, or *interiorisation*, Sartre is better able to express the mutual implication of such contrary forces.

To be precise, the first book of the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* is orientated towards demonstrating how ultimately the dimension of interiority, in its very detotalising force, represents dialectically the *driving force* of ever new totalisations. In an obvious sense this is because the individual himself is a product of the inert totality which is to be worked on and negated, and is only able to accomplish his negation on the basis provided by this inert past totality or totalisation. Another reason is that the inert material field worked on has itself the tendency to with its own form of 'counter finalities' uniting the isolated interiorities that variously negated it around a new shared principle of scarcity: technological advances, for example, born under the impulse of the negation of a certain type of scarcity, expose new material or technological absences, or return within unintended consequences, which impose new forms of scarcity on all. More significantly, however, the individual in his detotalisation ultimately contributes to retotalisation insofar as part of the inert, practical field on which he works and negates are *other* individuals. One individual imposes a negation upon another and this same individual likewise imposes a negation on the first. In effect one individual imposes a certain material value upon another, attempts to render this individuals as a material value within the field in which he works: as part of his *means* of labour. The same process is likewise imposed upon this individual by the other. Both as such reciprocally cause the ends of each other to 'deviate': one individual must assume the material status imposed upon by the other in order likewise to impose his own material on this other. As such imposed upon all individuals reciprocally are 'deviations' from their original ends towards a set of alien ends. The sum total of this dynamic is the creation of a social logic beyond all: 'by the very reciprocity of constraints and autonomies, the law finishes by escaping all, and it is in this revolving movement of totalisation that it appears as dialectical reasoning, that is to say exterior to all because interior to each one. . . .'<sup>310</sup> From the very basis of free praxis, by virtue of the deviation of the praxis of each individual provoked by each other and all others, arises a society 'full of acts without an author, constructions without a constructor', an *unintelligible* society, society as totality, where all are 'equally in the dark'.<sup>311</sup> Praxis, as the process of

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<sup>310</sup> Sartre, J.P *Critique de la raison dialectique* (Paris, Gallimard, 1960) p135

<sup>311</sup> Ibid p102

interiorisation, both disintegrates and yet ultimate unifies the totality. Interiorisation becomes the temporal moment in the passage from one totality to the next: the contrary processes of interiorisation and totalisation flow into each other in the form of a *cycle*, in the form of a ‘totalisation tournante’.

We have here another existentialist Marxism in which Hegel’s ruse of reason serves as means to demonstrate the mutual implication of servitude and liberty in society. Beyond this insidious force of totalisation, however, Sartre like Levinas is concerned with glimpsing justice through the injustice of this totalisation, humanity through its dimension of inhumanity. Totalisation is not simply the product of a ‘ruse’ but is animated by an integrative force which manifests itself only at the immanent level of the encounter of one ‘interiority’ with another. Via the process of totalisation, each individual and society as a whole takes on a certain alien character: ‘for each person, man exists as inhuman humanity or, if one prefers, as a foreign species’.<sup>312</sup> The human species and each representative of it becomes inhuman and foreign insofar as society becomes the unintelligible medium through which alien necessities are imposed upon each individual by all other individuals. Yet this ‘inhuman’ character cannot entirely define our relations with others. If this were the case, no society whether in the form of totality or any another would be possible: the disintegrative force of individual praxis would remain simply at the level of disintegration without dialectically becoming integration. Beneath the ‘external’ relations between individuals governed by the alien necessities which society imposes on individuals, society as an unintelligible existence in-itself, persists ‘relations of interiority’:

In the universe of exteriority, the relation of exteriority (of each person) to the material universe and to the Other is always accidental even if always present, his relation of interiority with men with things is fundamental even if often masked.<sup>313</sup>

‘Relations of exteriority’ are relations across a shared material field in which individuals themselves embody merely material values within the projects of other individuals: the other as competitor for the same scarce resources, as obstacle to the accomplishment of a goal, as a quantifiable force of labour capable of a certain amount of work in a certain amount of time, or alternatively as relation between individuals embodying a material value imposed in the same manner upon both from outside, according to the finality of another equally alien to

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid p206

<sup>313</sup> Ibid p132

both. Such external relations are ‘accidental’ although omnipresent, insofar as they imply ‘relations of interiority’ which are more ‘fundamental’ although ‘masked’.

What are these relations? ‘Praxis is always language’ writes Sartre.<sup>314</sup> Praxis is always language, and society always implies relations of interiority, because the signification which materiality takes on in language and praxis is precisely always shared. Materiality can only become an alien medium functioning according to its own unintelligible ends if it is from the start a *common* medium, in the same way that language can express meaning only if it is a language shared by all. Sartre articulates a phenomenological argument close to that of Levinas’ articulating of the necessity of the appeal to the other, the one who ‘teaches’ the dimension of signification beyond intuition. The common root is Husserl: ‘All that holds for me’ writes Husserl ‘holds, as I know, for all other human beings whom I find present in my surrounding world. Experiencing them as human beings, I understand and accept each one of them as an Ego-subject just as I myself am one, and as related to his natural surrounding world. But I do this in such a way that I take their surrounding world to be one and the same world of which we are all conscious.’<sup>315</sup> However ‘external’ my relation for Sartre, there is a relation of interiority with the other since I do not recognise him as a simple object within my private world, but recognise this world as already a *common* world *shared* with the other. Other individuals are not encountered simply as inert material means or obstacles in the way that other objects are. There is always already recognition on the behalf of one party that the other individual has his own ends, his own future and that ones own world is inscribed with significations *other* than ones own. Without this recognition of the other as more than an obstacle the chain of reciprocal deviations of the finalities through which the ruse of totalisation functions would not be possible. The external relation in which one individual encounters another as an obstacle is always the *superficial* level of society. More fundamentally, society is the common intrigue of these individuals together towards the continual creation and recreation of a common field. ‘In truth each word is unique . . . outside, it is a common institution. Speaking consists not in making a vocable enter into the brain by the ear, but of drawing by sounds the interlocutor to this vocable, as a common and exterior property.’<sup>316</sup> Each negating act of praxis one individual performs upon another is simultaneously the exercising of an *attracting force* of each individual on the other. Each

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid p181

<sup>315</sup> ‘Phenomenology as Transcendental Philosophy’ in Husserl, E *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology* ed. by Welton, D (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1999) pp60-85 (p62)

<sup>316</sup> Sartre, Critique p181



encounter with another individual in the shared material field is simultaneously an invocation to this other, and vice versa, to *join* and *rejoin* this field.

‘Relations of interiority’ are always presupposed in the ‘external’, material relations that govern society; and yet the former can never be separated from the latter. Another advantage in bringing Sartre into play here is that like Levinas, he uses the same language to articulate this, namely the language of the ‘other’ and the ‘third’. ‘When I wish to situate myself in the social world’ writes Sartre, ‘I discover around me ternary or binary formations of which the first are in perpetual disintegration and of which the second appear against the background of a revolving totalisation (*totalisation tournante*) and can at each moment integrate themselves into a trinity.’<sup>317</sup> Relations with the other take place in the movement of the ‘perpetual disintegration’ of the third, and the third takes place in the movement of the integration of the other into the cycle of the revolving totalisation. In this can be detected Sartre’s different understanding of the dynamic between other and third. Sartre’s logic of the other and the third approaches namely that which Wolff believes the logic of the other and the third *should* be in Levinas: heterogeneity’ Sartre writes, ‘can result in ‘reciprocal recognition’, can be *bridged* in the formation of the dyad, only via an appeal to the third person, to the totality by which it can be ‘institutionalized’.<sup>318</sup> The relation with the third for Sartre does not follow the relation with the other but is *prior* to it. There can be no relation between self and other for Sartre which cannot accomplish itself against the background of the third party, society as a whole, that is, or the totality as *a priori*. The relation with the other, the direct relation of interiority, is accomplished as a form of praxis upon the inert material base of the third, as the *determinate negation* of the relation with the third. ‘The moment that it actualises itself . . . it closes in on itself. The dualistic organisation establishes itself in the revolving totalisation and denies this totalisation from the moment of its establishment.’<sup>319</sup> The relation with the other closes in upon itself as an alliance, as a denial of the relation with the third which nonetheless grounds it.

The relation with the other is inextricably implicated in the relation with the third, whilst at the same time receding from this relation. The relation with the other, the direct ‘relation of interiority’, can accomplish itself only across an ‘institutionalisation’: the dynamic integrative or attracting force which the relation with the other represents petrifies once more into the relation with the third, into a new inert totality. The relation with the other, the direct ‘relation

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid p189

<sup>318</sup> Ibid

<sup>319</sup> Ibid p188

of interiority', always undergoes an infinite series of deviations in which its meaning and purpose always escape it, a series of deviations which *all* individuals impose on *all* others, and is thus deflected from the direct path of interiority, is subject to a *detour*. What this signifies is that there is no inalienable dimension or self-coherent meaning of the 'relation of interiority' that can be extracted from the 'external' relation or 'triadic' relation. The dimension of interiority for Sartre as such becomes radically *elusive*: 'the *hidden* existence of a human relation'.<sup>320</sup> It is the presupposition of the existence of a common, synthetic material field, created by individuals and yet within which each individual takes on a material value. It is a presupposition, always *in flight* from within that which presupposes it. Interiority becomes an infinitely receding dimension. 'The dispersion of human relations . . . transforms, by all the other relations, each one of them into a relation *otherwise*. Or, if one prefers, the Other is produced as the unity in flight of all insofar as it is discovered in each one as necessary alteration of direct reciprocity.'<sup>321</sup> A direct grasping of the relation with the other is never possible, because the relation with all others which conditions us, the other and our relation with another always deviates this relation from any directness, any 'face to face' encounter. The 'face to face' relation becomes the trajectory of each such encounter, yet always deviates, is always *deflected*, from this path. The unintelligibility of society as a whole enters between one individual and another to deflect their relation. Within the horizon of each relation there is 'an ungraspable swarming of other relations'.<sup>322</sup> Thus although each relation is a relation in view of the interiority of an other, no particular relation possesses this interiority; interiority, society, is always absent, *elsewhere*: 'We will always find a concrete materiality (movement, headquarters, edifice, word etc.) which supports and manifests a flight which gnaws away at it. I need only open my window: I see a church, a bank, a café; thus three more collectives; this one thousand franc note is another; another still, the paper which I have just bought.'<sup>323</sup> Those who constitute the bank as a bank, as a common, social institution, are always absent, elsewhere; those who constitute the church as a church are always elsewhere, absent and so on. The 'relation with the other' becomes a principle which belongs to no relation. It becomes the principle of a society which always flees from its products. Each relation in society is in the image of a directness which can be accomplished in no relation, which is always in flight. The 'relation with the other', indeed any relation or sociality at all, is possessed by no-one and manifests itself in no particular situation. It is

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid p185

<sup>321</sup> Ibid p326

<sup>322</sup> Ibid

<sup>323</sup> Ibid

rather the infinitely receding dimension indicated at each moment in a common social field, as the absence which is this commonality and society: the infinitely receding *intelligibility* of society from the unintelligible cycle of totalisation.

It is here that Sartre's notion of the relation with the other approaches the eschatological logic inscribed in Levinas' articulation of this relation. The relation with the other, the determinate negation of the relation with the third, is radically elusive and always infinitely recedes from this relation; *and yet* this infinitely receding dimension must always remain on the horizon of each 'external relation', each relation with the third, precisely in order for this latter relation *to become a relation*: precisely in order that the other individual not represent simply a material obstacle or tool. The relation with the third requires the relation with the other as a possibility, indeed its most essential possibility. The third person is 'the necessary foundation upon which reciprocity is recognized', and yet the 'binary formation, as immediate relation between one man and another, is fundamentally necessary for all ternary relation'. In the 'lived' and 'concrete' moment of individual praxis, or simultaneous moments of the praxis of all individuals in society, the *totalisation* of society be accomplished only as the movement towards an other under the form of a 'direct relation'. The relation with the third must always contain the *promise* of the relation with the other. Sartre expresses it as follows:

The hidden existence of a human relation rejects the physical and social obstacles, in brief the inert world, to the rank of an inessential reality: this permanent inessentiality is there as a passive possibility.<sup>324</sup>

The relation with the third, inescapable, must nonetheless appear as 'inessential'. The relation with the third, relation as it actually occurs in society, is rendered inessential in face of the '*passive possibility*' of the relation of interiority, or relation with the other. Totality itself, once taken in a dynamic sense as 'totalisation' from the point of departure of individual praxis, must contain the direct relation of interiority as its permanent 'passive possibility': it becomes the very trajectory by which this process of totalisation is accomplished. The relation with the third party, the material and external relation with the other, could not exist *as* relation if it did not occur in face of the 'permanent', 'objective' and yet '*passive possibility*' in face of whose hidden existence one can reject the materiality and externality of this relation as 'inessential'.

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<sup>324</sup> Ibid p185

Can Levinas' eschatological relation with the other ultimately be defined in similar terms as such a 'passive possibility'? For all that Levinas builds upon it, at stake in Levinas is also ultimately a question of 'relations of interiority' set against the 'exteriority' of the third: 'The plurality required for conversation results from the interiority with which each term is endowed' argues Levinas, establishing a reciprocity and parallel between self and other across the dimension of interiority which strictly he should not allow himself. (TI59) Levinas, according to Bloechl, 'must be considered to proceed not from Saying to Said, but contrarily. The Said, he argues, will have already been convened by a Saying.'<sup>325</sup> Bloechl's interpretation of expression, using the language of *Otherwise than Being*, corresponds to what has here been argued: it is not that the Said should be understood in terms of the Saying, as means through which the Saying realizes itself in concrete, historical reality. It is rather the case that the Saying should be understood from the point of departure of the Said. That the Saying is *glimpsed through* the said, the relation with the other *through* the relation with the third, constitutes, that is, the Saying as a *function* of the Said, the other as a *function* of the third, justice as a *function* of injustice. The being-glimpsed-through is an essential dynamic of the relation with the third: or in other words, it is only insofar as the relation with the third is rendered 'inessential' in face of the relation with the other that the relation with the third can be rendered *as* relation. The third, that is, is not the means through which the relation with the other is rendered concrete, as the *means* through which it renders itself historically effective as it is often understood in Levinas scholarship. It is rather the case that the 'passive possibility' of the relation with the other is the *means* through which the 'relation' with the third, the contradiction in terms of an 'external relation', can realize itself *as* relation. The relation with other constitutes in itself, that is, its own form of praxis, a form of praxis whose particular intelligibility should be understood apart from the question of 'institutional application'.

It is worth remembering here the structure of Levinas' narrative: we begin with the question of the third, of injustice or alienation or being as 'war' or in other words 'totality'; we then proceed to the relation with the other in which this totality is ruptured; this relation nonetheless then reconstitutes the totality in more or less similar terms as before. 'The presence of the third - of all the other thirds - merely brings us back to where we started, with being and with totalization.'<sup>326</sup> Alternatively, in *Ego and Totality* we pass from the third to the

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<sup>325</sup> Bloechl, J *The Liturgy of the Neighbour: Emmanuel Levinas and the Religion of Responsibility* (Pittsburgh, Dunesque University Press, 2000) p216

<sup>326</sup> Weitzman op cit

other, and then in *Totality and Infinity* from other to third. The messianic relation with the other, in other words, is on the point of convergence of disintegration and integration in the cycle of the ‘totalisation tournante’. It is on the point of convergence between the forces of de-totalisation and re-totalisation, and as such unites around itself in a single ritual cycle the process of totalisation, de-totalisation and re-totalisation. As the anticipation of redemption in Rosenzweig allows the daemonic individual and collective soul of the Jewish community to close the circle of its fate, to gain ever renewed momentum for the cycle of its ritual calendar, so the ‘eschatological’ relation with the other as *sanctus* unites around it and accordingly donates just such a ritual character to the life cycle of the third.

This is what we call the *parody* of messianism in Levinas: the eschatological horizon is transformed into the *passive possibility* of that which could not *function* without this possibility. It represents an end, *the* end par excellence, rendered as *means*. It is in this sense that our critique of Levinas ties in with Scholem’s observation that messianic expectation in Rosenzweig becomes merely the means through which the Jewish community derives the ever renewed energy for the eternally *revolving* Jewish calendar. The eschatological relation with the other in Levinas here functions in parallel in terms of the means through which not society considered as static totality but rather Sartre’s ‘*totalisation tournante*’ accomplishes itself. We registered above Horowitz’ objection to the passage from the other to the third as Levinas formulates it: ‘the relationship of ontology to ethics simply as critique is every bit “the fixed and permanent state of affairs” that Levinas sees as the “danger of eschatology,” when the *eschaton* is thought to be, à la Hegelian dialectics, a “finite fusion” with the infinite. Paradoxically to accept the finality of the paradox that keeps the situation open, is to close the situation.’<sup>327</sup> This stable equilibrium is the very purpose of this eschatology, is inscribed in the very logic of an eschatology rendered as the ‘permanent’ yet ‘passive’ possibility of society. Messianism becomes the ‘passive possibility’ of the relation with the other from which the cycle of totalisation, the cycle of the relation with the third, gains its momentum.

In this respect we should note a certain displacement in the time orientation of messianism in *Totality and Infinity*. Levinas, we noted, declares his preference for the rabbinic rationalistic branch of messianism, shying away from the apocalyptic element of Jewish eschatological expectation which a Scholem or Taubes highlights.<sup>328</sup> As we observed, the relation with the other opens the messianic horizon, allows the self to ‘step outside history’ at

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<sup>327</sup> Horowitz, *Ethics at a Standstill* p35

<sup>328</sup> Mattern, J ‘Memoire et messianisme: sur l’idée messianique chez Gershom Sholem, Jacob Taubes et Emmanuel Levinas’ *Cahiers d’Etudes Lévinassiennes* 4 (2005) pp201-232

each moment. Yet what is the precise sense of this ‘stepping outside history’ into the ‘messianic’ realm? ‘The subject must find itself “at a distance” from its own being . . . In order that objective distance be hollowed out, it is necessary that while in being the subject be not yet in being, that a certain sense it be not yet born – that it not be in nature.’ (TI209) Interiority ‘can step outside history’ via the relation with the other insofar as through this relation the subject finds itself at a ‘distance from its own being’, as being ‘not yet born’. Messianic deferral in Levinas, in other words, has nothing to do with the Maimonidean ‘patience, though he may tarry’: at work in *Totality and Infinity* is not a deferred relation with the ‘messianic beyond’ to come, with the messianic future. It is the theme of the perpetual deferral of the inevitable *present* which is dominant in Levinas’ phenomenology of time in *Totality and Infinity*. The ‘time of interiority’ signifies most often as subjective time set against the objective, impersonal and inhuman time of history into which subjectivity would otherwise be entirely integrated. ‘The free will is necessity relaxed and postponed rather than finite freedom. It is détente or distension . . . which finds for itself a dimension of retreat there where the inexorable is imminent.’ (TI224) The ‘time of interiority’ is the time of ‘retreat’ before the superior force of history and the inexorable advance which it represents: it is this which the eschatological relation with the infinite allows. The ego in this retreat is allowed a deferral of the *present* and the inevitability of what it represents: ‘the perpetual postponing of the hour of treason – infinitesimal difference between man and non-man’ (TI35) Desire does not produce an inalienable relation with the messianic future; rather it merely allows the ego to defer the still inevitable instant of its own inhumanity, a recurring theme in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>329</sup> The messianic ‘future’ indeed becomes no more than the future as present postponed: ‘human freedom resides in the future, always still minimally future, of its non-freedom’. (TI237) We have here something of a confession of weakness by Levinas concerning his vision of the sanctification of the human: interiority cannot *detach* itself from the present of history, only *defer* it. *Totality and Infinity* appears to refute, that is, Bensussan’s construal of the subjective experience of time, the ‘lived time’ of interiority as essentially messianic.<sup>330</sup> Rather than essentially messianic, *Totality and Infinity* would seem to suggest that interiority is rather structured in terms of the *postponement* of an immanent *catastrophe*. ‘Life permits . . . a leave of absence, a postponement, which is precisely interiority’.(TI55) Messianism, as articulated in Levinas’ ‘philosophical’ writings, loses the dimension of expectation or anticipation and is constructed precisely as this postponement of the inevitable,

<sup>329</sup> See for example TI56, 160, 233, 237

<sup>330</sup> Bensussan, Temps Messianique p11

this 'leave of absence' or, if I may be permitted an extension in Levinas' chain of metaphors, a stay of execution. It is the infinite renewal of this stay of execution to which Levinas ultimately attributes the 'messianic triumph'.<sup>331</sup>

That messianism should become the deferred relation to the present, rather than relation with future, would appear entirely natural once it is ordered according to the logic of the 'passive possibility' inscribed in the cycle of the 'totalisation tournante': as the detotalising force which drives the cycle of totalisation. Yet can Levinas's eschatological relation with the other be so unproblematically integrated with Sartre's logic of the passive possibility? For Sartre it is true, the exodus or flight of interiority of the relation with the other from the relation with the third is a form of *privation*, a steady and continuous *leakage* of intelligibility. Yet for Levinas, as we have seen there must be a privileged signifier by means of which this leakage of interiority can be stopped up: 'the presence of a being not entering into, but overflowing the sphere of the same determines its "status" as infinite. This overflowing is to be distinguished from the image of liquid overflowing a vessel, because this overflowing presence is effectuated as a position *in face of* the same.' (TI195/6) For Sartre as for Levinas the integrative force according to which the cycle of the 'totalisation tournante' is accomplished is the dynamic of initiation into the interiority, into the 'profaned secret', implied in each relation between strangers in the public sphere. In expressing this rite of initiation via the master-disciple relation by means of which the face is raised to totemic height, Levinas attempts *eschatologically* to render present or immanent what is absent or withdrawing. In thus attempting to render immanent what is withdrawing Levinas' 'messianism', it is true, exceeds the Sartrean 'passive possibility'.

On the other hand, the trajectory in which the Sartrean 'passive possibility' of the other is overcome is also the trajectory of the overcoming of messianism in Levinas' discourse. In Levinas the logic of the relation with the other 'glimpsed through' the third as *modality* of the third is intensified to the point of the sheer translucence of the latter: thus the third is altered from the 'before' the other of *Ego and Totality* to the 'after' the other of *Totality and Infinity*. Yet once the other is no longer a modality of the third glimpsed through the third, once the

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<sup>331</sup> 'Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return to the infinite time does not prohibit. Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness? The problem exceeds the bounds of this book'. (TI285) For Cariamelli, F 'Un temps achevé? Questions critiques à propos du Messianique chez Lévinas' *Cahiers d'Etudes Lévinassiennes* 4 (2005) pp11-20 Levinas is here entertaining the notion of a final eschatological closure of time, a closure which runs the risk of returning to the closed horizon of the ontology and the totality which the relation with the infinite is to rupture. Yet to our mind what is indicated here in is 'this extreme vigilance' rather a relation of undecidability set up between the notion of a future 'eternal closure' and the 'perpetual', a perpetuity which clearly refers to the perpetuity of the deferral of history rendered possibility by 'fecundity'/'paternity'.

third becomes rather the modality, the *emanation*, of the other, the other strictly speaking is no longer messianic. To trace this trajectory, however, we will have to turn from *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*.

### Conclusion

The significance of messianism in Levinas, or what we have called the parody of messianism, is brought to light once a certain dynamic in *Totality and Infinity* is reconfigured according to its implicit logic. The principle passage in Levinas' text is *not* that from the relation with the other to the relation with the third; it is rather the reverse. The relation with the third is *not* moreover first and foremost a question of the institutional application of the ethical relation with the other. The question of the third is rather primarily a question of the intelligibility of society as a whole, and the other is the key to this intelligibility. It is here that the messianic value of 'straightforwardness' takes on meaning: the relation with the other is messianic insofar as it eschatologically *short-circuits* the hermeneutical detour of society as a whole, eschatologically *catches up* with the receding principle of interiority. As such it negotiates between two concepts of totality. Before functioning according to metaphysical logic, the relation with other functions according to the totemic logic of the raising of a privileged sign set apart as means by means of which all other signs can be deciphered. Messianism in Levinas is governed by the *sanctification* of the human, the building of a refuge for the negative ontology of the 'human', a place from which it can be expressed positively as 'plenitude'. Messianism is thus also governed by the *fetishisation* of the human: it represents the construction of a place of 'refuge' for the 'living core' erected upon a charnel house; a 'direct' relation with what is always receding from relation. This constitutes a parody of messianism: it functions according to the logic of the 'passive possibility'. The other is glimpsed through the relation with the third and as such the relation with the third, not in itself a relation, is rendered as relation. It becomes the 'passive possibility' in view of which the cycle of totalisation gains the momentum for its cyclical, ritual renewal. It constitutes in itself, that is, its own form of *embedded* praxis. We noted that already in *Totality and Infinity* there is already a moving beyond messianism. In the following chapter we will observe the manner in which the dynamic of the sanctification of the human which structures the entry of messianism in Levinas' discourse, in its further intensification in *Otherwise than Being*, ultimately leaves behind messianism.



## CHAPTER 5) MESSIANISM IN *OTHERWISE THAN BEING*

### Introduction

Many of the essentials of this final chapter have been anticipated. Following the evolution from one distinct species of messianism to another traced in the last two chapters, in this chapter a third distinct species corresponding to Levinas final major work *Otherwise than Being* is to be expected. This messianism or dynamic of salvation, we have suggested, is ordered according to the dynamic of the sanctification of the human. The heightening of this dynamic of sanctification in this work corresponds to the trajectory of the disappearance of messianism insofar as this heightening necessitates a means of expression other than Messianism for its articulation. An understanding of the particular character of messianism in *Otherwise than Being* requires a tracing of some of the more general structural transformations which Levinas' phenomenological vision undergoes in the passage between his two principal works. Against the background of these transformations we will then outline the messianic paradigm which corresponds to *Otherwise than Being*, that of a variation on the 'suffering servant' figure of deutero-Isaiah. We will trace the consensus over its nature amongst commentators, before questioning aspects of this consensus in light of the specific logic according to which the paradigm of the suffering servant is ordered in *Otherwise than Being*. This will require an examination of the phenomenology of time which structures Levinas' rendition of this paradigm, and subsequently an examination of the specific function which this paradigm serves within the transformed vision of humanism which Levinas articulates in *Otherwise than Being*. On the basis of this, we will then identify, as we did for *Totality and Infinity*, the dynamics of sanctification/fetishisation underlying this paradigm, before exploring the aspects of what we would identify as the parody and indeed ultimate disappearance of the messianic horizon from Levinas' work.

### From *Totality and Infinity* to *Otherwise than Being*

'Whoever takes Levinas' work *Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence* to hand' writes Strasser, 'immediately receives the impression of being confronted with something new.'<sup>332</sup> We shall outline the novelties of *Otherwise than Being* at a general level, before examining

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<sup>332</sup> Strasser, S *Jenseits von Sein und Zeit: Eine Einführung in Emmanuel Levinas' Philosophie* (Den Haag, Martinus Nijhoff, 1978) p219

how these condition more specifically the evolution of the eschatological dimension in this work.

Derrida's critique of Levinas, 'Violence and Metaphysics' stands between Levinas major works, and is often considered as instrumental for the evolution of Levinas' thought. The thrust of Derrida's critique is, as we have seen, that Levinas' work is guided by the impossible dream of a thought of 'radical difference', of a pure 'heterological thought', one which has for aim to escape the violent and reductive character of language relative to all difference. 'Not to philosophise is still to philosophise' Derrida admonishes Levinas: the attempt to express within philosophy, within language or within the all encompassing horizon of ontology that which exceeds it will necessarily fail. Levinas' articulation of the relation with the other is interpreted by Derrida as the attempt to preserve the pure particularity and transcendence of the other in face of its reduction as a signifier within ontology. Yet in this attempt, Levinas inevitably succumbs to the violence of language: infinity cannot be articulated otherwise than the negation of the finite and thus can take only relative meaning within the nexus of signifiers which constitutes language; alternatively, absolute singularity can only be articulated in philosophy as a general category. Levinas, it appears, is guilty of a certain naivety. This manifests itself, according to Derrida, particularly in Levinas' relation to Heidegger. Levinas wants to overturn the privilege of Being in relation to beings in Heidegger: he wants to leave behind, *forget* the horizon of fundamental ontology. Yet this forgetting of Being appears as such as merely a variant form of onto-theological discourse, a discourse characterised essentially by the forgetting of Being. Onto-theology is, to recall, the forgetting of the radical difference between Being and beings in presenting the former in terms of a privileged being, namely that of a supreme being, of God. For Levinas, likewise in attempting to exempt the other from ontology Levinas merely articulates the status of the other in parallel terms to that of God. The relation with the face of the other in Levinas becomes the birth of language and of signification, and thus the other becomes the being par excellence in terms of which all other beings can be explained.

According to Derrida, moreover, Levinas is in a particular predicament. Because his work is orientated towards the vision of the non-violent relation with the other through speech, the escape route of negative theology is barred for him. Levinas' philosophy remains tied to the dimension of language, of 'conversation' and 'teaching' between self and other, and cannot thus appeal apophatically to the contingent character of language. Thus Levinas' work remains tied to the dream of a language without violence, an 'impossible and self-contradictory' dream according to Derrida. 'In its original possibility as offer, in its still silent

intention, language is non-violent' writes Derrida. Yet as soon as language assumes any content, it assumes a necessary reductive and violent character. Yet without assuming content and thus violence, language has no meaning; offering a non-violent language to the other would be to offer nothing. Such a language would be without any content at all, a language entirely empty and without signification.<sup>333</sup>

'Not to philosophise is still to philosophise' argues Derrida; 'not to philosophise would *not* be still to philosophise' writes Levinas'. (DQVI96) Rather than accept the inevitability of the violence of language, and the Derridean compromise of following the fashion in which, whilst language always reduces difference, the trajectory of this difference nonetheless always haunts language, a language constructed not simply of the reduction of the other but an *economy* of the same and other, *Otherwise than Being* is determined by a more radical search for the pure, non-violent level of language.

In the terms with which we have framed our work, *Otherwise than Being* is characterised, in other words, by a further heightening of the dynamic of *sanctification*. It is characterised by a more *radical* setting apart of the relation with the other. With regards to specifics, Derrida's critique that the attempt to subvert the ontological order ultimately succumbs to it is accompanied in *Otherwise than Being* by a rethinking of the question of ontology. As Strasser points out, *Totality and Infinity* is not ultimately concerned with escaping ontology as such, rather with escaping from 'Totality' to a more authentic relation with Being, one in which the priority between beings and Being is inverted. *Totality and Infinity* is still framed in terms of the transcendental question of Being, whilst *Otherwise than Being* is framed as the attempt to step beyond ontology as such.<sup>334</sup> Alternatively, if *Totality and Infinity* represents the naïve forgetting of ontological difference, then *Otherwise than Being* represents a self-aware forgetting of this difference. As Kosky puts it, *Otherwise than Being* is characterized by an 'indifference' to this question, a rendering of this difference secondary in relation to a more fundamental difference. This more fundamental difference is that of the 'Saying' and the 'Said', a distinction heightening the metaphysics of expression also underlying *Totality and Infinity*. Saying represents the *event* of language as such, set apart from the content of what this event conveys in order to embody its own self-contained intelligibility. All that the 'ontological difference' entails, Being as set apart from beings, is subsequently incorporated into the horizon of the Said, the content of language or language as the 'density of a linguistic product' as *Totality and Infinity* put it. The ontological difference is to pale in face of this

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<sup>333</sup> Derrida, *Violence and Metaphysics* p148

<sup>334</sup> Strasser, *Einführung* p223

more radical difference.<sup>335</sup> This new and more ‘radical’ difference is to go beyond the inescapable violence of language. *Otherwise than Being*, as Cariamelli frames it, is the attempt to articulate in language the relation with the other which takes place at a pre-predicative and pre-cognitive level. *Otherwise than Being* becomes as such the paradoxical attempt to articulate within predication and cognition that which exceeds it.<sup>336</sup>

The exigencies which the attempt to articulate a more radical sanctification impose, in turn cause a shift in the centre of balance of Levinas’ phenomenology. In its more radical alterity, the other indeed all but disappears from the horizon of Levinas’ phenomenology. Rather than articulating the face as site of a ‘plenitude of discourse’, or as ‘prime intelligible’, the face becomes rather, as Strasser puts it, the site of an absence.<sup>337</sup> The focus in *Otherwise than Being* is no longer on the other as such, but on the self who is affected by this other. Where *Totality and Infinity* is essentially a phenomenology of the epiphany of the other as the face, writes Peperzaak, *Otherwise than Being* stresses the genesis of the selfhood of the subject.<sup>338</sup> The other by whom the self is affected and who invests this responsibility is registered in the text in the form of a ‘trace’ of that which is already absent: the moment one is able to turn from the self affected to the other who affects, the addressee to the addressor, this other has already disappeared. Alternatively, as Bergo understands it, *Otherwise than Being*, in view of the search for an ever more radical transcendence, paradoxically retreats more radically into the immanence of the self in order to reach the level of consciousness at which the point of pure vulnerability and exposure of the self to the other reveals itself.<sup>339</sup> In effect the focus on the point of vulnerability and exposure of the self blocks any possible vantage point for viewing the relation with the other; this relation is only surmised from this point, as a ‘trace’ of that which has already departed from the consciousness affected.

This shift in the centre of balance has evident consequences for the messianic element of Levinas’ work. Given the shift in emphasis from the ‘epiphany of the face’ towards the notion of the face as trace of that which has already departed, the messianism of the master-disciple relation centred on the ‘conversation’ across the Oral Torah loses its intelligibility. The chain of metaphors which expressed this relation in *Totality and Infinity* are put to one side. As Peperzaak points out, the metaphors of height and ascension become infrequent in *Otherwise*

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<sup>335</sup> Kosky, *Philosophy of Religion* p48

<sup>336</sup> Cariamelli, *Ethique et Transcendance* p95-7

<sup>337</sup> Strasser, *Einführung* p232

<sup>338</sup> Peperzaak, *Beyond* p 75

<sup>339</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p152

*than Being*.<sup>340</sup> In parallel, the entire dimension of ‘teaching’ which grounded messianism in *Totality and Infinity* becomes problematic in view of a notion of the face as the site of an absence.<sup>341</sup> We might also note that the messianism of the feminine against the background of *eros*, already marginalized in *Totality and Infinity*, disappears entirely although, as Keyser highlights, a new set of maternal motifs attached rather to the dimension of *self*-consciousness arises.<sup>342</sup> In place of these messianisms, a new messianic figure is articulated. *Otherwise than Being* is marked, we noted, by the retreat away from the relation with the other into the immanence of consciousness in order to uncover the point of pure exposure of this consciousness. *Otherwise than Being* is marked in turn by the uncovering of ‘messianic consciousness’ at the deepest strata of subjectivity. As Bergo, puts it ‘messianic consciousness and prophetism concern OBBE above all.’<sup>343</sup> In effect for Bergo, this ‘messianic consciousness’ is not a new messianic figure but rather a realization of what only remained implicit in *Totality and Infinity*. Despite the radical shift in focus of *Otherwise than Being*, the ‘messianic consciousness’ which this work articulates from other to self, it is this ‘messianic consciousness’ which Levinas already had in mind in *Totality and Infinity*: It is as though TI’s timorous introduction of the notion of “messianic consciousness” had continued to resonate like a summons to Levinas’ argues Bergo, a summons ‘to reach backward, toward that consciousness.’<sup>344</sup>

To this radical shift in orientation of Levinas’ messianic theory corresponds a radically new language. The relation with the other no longer occurs across the straightforwardness of ‘conversation’ and of ‘teaching’; it takes place on the ‘underside’ of subjectivity. (OB49) It takes place across the ‘exposure’ and ‘vulnerability’ of the self to the other: ‘the subjectivity of a subject is vulnerability, exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity’. (OB50) The other no longer stops the self in its tracks insofar as representing a source of authority ‘from on high’; the self is affected by the other because it comes into contact with the self at the point of greatest vulnerability and passivity, the point where it offers no defence against the other. On the basis of this, a chain of metaphors follow. ‘The one is exposed to the other as a skin is exposed to what wounds it, as a cheek is offered to the smiter.’ (OB49) The self is the one who, at the most fundamental level of its being, offers no resistance to the other, is exposed in passivity to the other. As such ‘it is as though

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<sup>340</sup> Peperzaak, *Beyond* p81

<sup>341</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p133

<sup>342</sup> Keyser, P *Emmanuel Levinas: La Trace du Féminin* (Paris, Presses Universitaires Paris, 2000)

<sup>343</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p133

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid* p149

persecution of the self by another were at the bottom of solidarity with another.’ (OB102) The self is ‘persecuted’ by the other, the other ‘traumatises’ the self. (OB111) The self is the ‘hostage’ of the other. (OB124) At the same time, the self is nonetheless ‘inspired’ by the other: ‘the one-for-another has the form of sensibility or vulnerability, pure passivity or susceptibility, passive to the point of becoming an inspiration.’ (OB67) The ‘inspiration’ of the self by the other is precisely the inspiration to the self-identity of the self. It is in the *recoil* or ‘recurrence’ into itself before the trauma of the pure exposure to the other that the self becomes itself. The ‘persecution’ of the self by the other is also an ‘assignation’ or ‘election’ of the self by the other, an election to subjectivity and selfhood by the other. Subjectivity is the ‘suffering servant’ who is born into persecution and yet who accepts this persecution as his vocation. Likewise for Kavka, this torsion of the messianic dimension in Levinas, from the other to the self, is the realisation of messianism in Levinas’ oeuvre, the realization of a messianism ‘in which the Messiah I await is not external to myself’.<sup>345</sup> Alternatively, for Lahache ‘the Messiah is none other than the self in the work of Levinas’.<sup>346</sup>

Beyond the ‘persecution’ of the self by the other, this election is an election to ‘responsibility’ for the other, precisely for the one who persecutes. In the pure exposure of self to other, the relation with the other represents an ‘inversion’ of the self from being ‘for-itself’ to *for* the other. (OB103) The self bears an ‘unlimited’ ‘unconditional’ and ‘indeclinable’ responsibility for the other. (OB124) This ‘infinite passion’ for responsibility, like desire in *Totality and Infinity*, is that which increases in the measure which the self attempts to assume and fulfil it. This hyperbolic character of responsibility manifests itself in particular in what is the key metaphor of *Otherwise than Being*, that of ‘substitution’. The self is one who most fundamentally substitutes itself for others: ‘the non-interchangeable par excellence, the I, the unique one, substitutes itself for others . . . its exceptional uniqueness in the passivity or the passion of the self is the incessant event of subjection to everything.’ (OB117) The self, in its self-identity, is one who takes on the burden of the sins of all others upon itself: ‘the self is a sub-jectum; it is under the weight of the universe, responsible for everything.’ (OB116) From this follows another set of metaphors: the self in the core of its self-identity is most essentially characterised by the ‘expiation’ for the other and all others: ‘There is substitution for another, expiation for another.’ (OB125) The self is indeed most

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<sup>345</sup> Kavka, Jewish Messianism p7

<sup>346</sup> Lahache, R ‘Le messianisme dans la pensée d’Emmanuel Levinas, une éthique du pro-nom’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et Judaïsme* ed. by Cohen-Levinas, D Trigano, S (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp349-362 (p361)

essentially a 'martyr' for the other: 'The subjectivity of the subject is persecution and martyrdom.' (OB146)

Given such a vision of the self, and in particular given the aspect of substitution and persecution, the paradigm which best appears to define the messianic horizon of *Otherwise than Being* is the messianism of the 'suffering servant'. In this 'persecution', 'responsibility' and 'substitution' of the self, deutero-Isaiah seems to resonate in the background: 'he was pierced for our transgressions/he was crushed for our iniquities/the punishment that brought us peace was upon him/and by his wounds we are healed.' (Isaiah 53:5) Levinas' final articulation of his messianic vision would accordingly be in continuity with that of Cohen in the *Religion of Reason*.<sup>347</sup> For Cohen the figure of the Messiah can be idealized as a symbol for the Jewish people itself, in particular the just 'remnant of Israel' which is itself the idealization of the ethical core of the Jewish way of life.<sup>348</sup> This ethical core is expressed in the fashion in which, argues Cohen, the messianic figure par excellence of the Israelites transforms from that of the offspring of David as king to the messiah as 'poor man' and 'servant of the Eternal'. The figure of the suffering servant is capable indeed of a further idealization, argues Cohen, one not limited to national boundaries or any particularise of Israel. It can be widened to all people: the messiah of Jewish tradition becomes the symbol for a universal humanitarian ethics.<sup>349</sup> The messiah should be viewed as the figure of the 'ideal man', one who is 'seized by the distress of mankind in its entirety' and who takes the suffering of all mankind on his shoulders, and who as such serves as a cipher for the messianic future of a united mankind beyond the limits which nationality and statehood currently impose.<sup>350</sup>

From the messianism of the other, other as messiah in *Totality and Infinity*, whose language is that of 'teaching', 'height', 'conversation', 'straightforwardness', there is a passage to the messianism of the self, the subject as 'suffering servant', whose language is that of 'persecution', 'hostageship', 'obsession', 'substitution', 'expiation', 'martyrdom' etc. There is a consensus that this inversion of the messianic paradigm from the messianism of the other to the same is the most authentic and complete expression of messianism in Levinas' work. Each previous expression of messianism in Levinas' work, despite the radical shift in perspective which *Otherwise than Being* represents, is but an incipient expression of this final

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<sup>347</sup> By far the best introduction to messianism in Cohen is Margel, S 'L'idealité du temps et le messianisme de l'histoire: le Messie kantien d'Hermann Cohen' *Lignes* 27 (2008) pp40-59

<sup>348</sup> Cohen, H *Religion of reason: out of the sources of Judaism* (Atlanta, Ga. Scholars Press, 1995) p260

<sup>349</sup> Ibid p268

<sup>350</sup> Ibid p264

messianism of the self. Messianism in Levinas is ultimately a messianism of substitution. Central to *Otherwise than Being* for Bergo is a deepening of subjectivity to the point of observing it as ‘founded upon messianic consciousness, or “substitution”, a subject which is not a subject of knowledge or consciousness, a restless and fissured subjectivity.’<sup>351</sup> Likewise for Lahache, ‘this messianic distension of singularity to which the language of being-touched gives witness . . . is evident throughout the oeuvre of Levinas: in the central notion which is substitution. Because substitution it is the action of the Messiah.’<sup>352</sup> Levinas’ work is driven by an entelechy towards the ‘messianism’ of substitution. Beyond substitution, the self is ‘messianic’ in the infinite task which it must take upon itself singlehandedly in the assumption of the inordinate weight of responsibility for all. On the one hand, this task involves the infinite path to one’s own moral self-perfection. Kavka speaks of the ‘blurring of the boundary between the anticipated Messiah and the human striving for perfection’ in Levinas, among others, in which ‘any person’ can attain Messiahship ‘though his or her teleological aim at human perfection.’<sup>353</sup> For Lahache, messianicism constitutes the ‘futurity’ of the future, in that it is in the ‘stretching’ of this task into infinity that, phenomenologically, the authentic dimension of the future opens.<sup>354</sup> On the other hand, this task involves taking on the responsibility for the realization of the messianic age without the aid of any notion of teleology in history. As Bergo puts it, ‘Jewish messianism can and ought to be understood precisely as Levinas’ ‘metaphysical desire’ and ‘responsibility’. The only attitude possible for humans before the commandment, then, is a Baeck like messianic attitude of expectation and conviction about what Levinas’ calls ‘eschatology’. The good will be realized in history, and we are necessary to its realization. We can not, however, explain how the good shall come to pass or why we are indeed a part of it.’<sup>355</sup> For Kavka and Bergo, the messianic mission of the self, in what constitutes something of a mixing of metaphors, is fully realized in the dimension of ‘prophetism’.<sup>356</sup> The messianic task of the self is realized for Kavka in the ‘prophetic’ drive to ensure ‘political sovereignty’ for the other and in so doing give witness to God as the origin of this selfless mission, one which ‘announces me as God’s agent with the power to act ethically and create political institutions that reflect that power.’<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p149

<sup>352</sup> Lahache, S ‘Le messianisme dans la pensée d’Emmanuel Levinas, une éthique du pro-nom’ in *Emmanuel Levinas: Philosophie et Judaïsme* ed. by Cohen-Levinas, D Trigano, S (Paris, In Press Editions, 2002) pp349-362 (p359)

<sup>353</sup> Kavka, *Jewish Messianism* p7/8

<sup>354</sup> Lahache, *Le messianisme* p360

<sup>355</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* p132

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid* p169

<sup>357</sup> Kavka, *Jewish Messianism* p179



The self as ‘messiah’, as suffering servant, finds its telos in the infinite ‘prophetic’ task to realize the messianic age within history by rendering concrete its messianic inspiration in social and political practice. This, we are told, is the trajectory of the ‘messianic consciousness’ in *Otherwise than Being*, the figure which is to represent the most complement embodiment of messianism in Levinas’ oeuvre. As opposed to another distinct and discrete figure in a series which Levinas’ work presents, the messianism of the ‘suffering servant’ would be implicit in all previous figures. Against this entelechy, however, we would firstly highlight the diversity of and indeed conflict between the messianic tropes we have explored throughout this study. In what follows we wish to focus, moreover, on the problematic character of this ‘messianic’ figure of the self which *Otherwise than Being* presents us. Does *Otherwise than Being* ultimately constitute a messianic text? Are we presented with the most complete expression of messianism in Levinas’ work or rather the trajectory of its disappearance?

### Otherwise than Messianism

The consensus we have traced is understandable: the thesis that *Otherwise than Being* is orientated around the construction of the messianic figure of the ‘suffering servant’, and that this figure is the culmination of Levinas’ messianic vision finds support elsewhere in Levinas’ work. ‘The Messiah, it is I, to be I, it is to be the Messiah’ writes Levinas in *Difficult Freedom*. ‘The Messiah is the just one who suffers, who took upon himself the suffering of others. In the final count who takes upon himself the suffering of others, if not the being who says “I”? (DL129) *Otherwise than Being* would be a realization of this ultimate paradigm adumbrated in Levinas’ consideration of messianic paradigms from the Talmud in the earlier work *Difficult Freedom*. For its consideration of the messianic dimension, *Totality and Infinity* took as its point of departure the messianic paradigm of the master-disciple relation, a paradigm which comes slightly earlier in the same text. (DL110) Apparently then in *Otherwise than Being* Levinas returns to the same work for new inspiration. That such inspiration is taken from what could be considered to be the culmination of Levinas’ ruminations on the figure of the messiah in the Talmud in *Difficult Freedom* would also provide the rationale for the entelechy traced in Levinas’ philosophical work.

That the characterization of *Otherwise than Being* as a messianic text might be problematic, however, is suggested first and foremost by the absence of any explicit reference to messianism in this text. *Totality and Infinity* opened and closed with a consideration of

messianism, with the relation of ‘eschatological peace’ announced in the preface and the ‘messianic triumph’ with which the main body of the text is concluded. There are no references to messianism in *Otherwise than Being* at any point in the text. Bergo’s argument that *Otherwise than Being* is determined by the project of articulating the ‘messianic consciousness’ announced already in *Totality and Infinity* depends on a certain reading of the conclusion of the latter text: ‘Messianic triumph is the pure triumph; it is secured against the revenge of evil whose return the infinite time does not prohibit. Is this eternity a new structure of time, or an extreme vigilance of the messianic consciousness? The problem exceeds the bounds of this book.’(TI285) Bergo reads *Otherwise than Being* as an assuming of this ‘problem’ which Levinas stated exceeded the bounds of *Totality and Infinity*. Yet it is not necessary to read Levinas in this way. The problem hinted at in the latter book is whether there is any difference between the *infinite* fending off of evil, or infinite postponement of the evil of history as we called it, and the *eternal* and ultimate triumph over evil. To our mind, this problem exceeds the bounds of *Totality and Infinity* for Levinas because it is a *theological* question, a question involving a certain kind of speculation about a possible final eschatological event which would exceed the horizon of any phenomenology no matter how broadly conceived. For phenomenology, the ambiguity between infinite vigilance and eternal closure must remain in ambiguity: *Otherwise than Being* in no way attempts to resolve it. Kavka notices the apparent absence of any concern with messianism in *Otherwise than Being*. The notion of a messianic self, he writes ‘appears to lead to a more attenuated messianism in *Otherwise than Being* than that which we have seen in those earlier texts. Indeed, as noted earlier, messianism is not even mentioned, and *Otherwise than Being* seems to mark a shift from the earlier theorizing of messianism as the apex of ethical action.’ Such a reading would be for Kavka superficial: ‘it would be incorrect to take this conclusion at its surface level. What Levinas refers to as prophecy is nothing less than a sacrifice of the self to (or a fulfilment of the self as) the path of divine agency that ends up effecting political autonomy for all.’<sup>358</sup>

Beyond the absence of any explicit reference to messianism, however, which indeed is not in itself decisive, the fundamental orientation of *Otherwise than Being* appears ill-suited for the construction of any eschatological horizon. Peperzaak frames this well: ‘although *Totality and Infinity* dedicates a chapter to the eschatological questions which also guide his commentaries on certain messianic texts in *Difficult Freedom*, in *Otherwise than Being* and most texts after *Totality and Infinite* he stresses the past that cannot become a present i.e. a past which cannot be

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<sup>358</sup> Kavka, *Jewish Messianism* p184

recollected, brought to mind, an “immemorial” past, “more” past than any memorable or recoverable past.<sup>359</sup> *Otherwise than Being* is concerned with the elaboration of a phenomenology of time or of ‘temporalisation’. Yet whilst *Time and the Other* was concerned with the dimension of the ‘radical’ future, *Otherwise than Being* is concerned with the radical past. In fact we already noted that the ‘messianism’ of *Totality and Infinity* involves a deflection from future to present, or to a messianism of the postponed present. *Otherwise than Being* would appear to take this tendency in Levinas’ phenomenology one step further, in a move in which the horizon of the future all but disappears from view.

This disappearance of the future and movement towards the past is the result of the introduction of a new model of temporality. *Otherwise than Being* in similar fashion to *Totality and Infinity* is concerned with the phenomenology of the ‘temporalisation’ of time. This is articulated, however, in a different fashion, using as interlocutor less the Heidegger of *Being and Time* than Husserl’s *Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time*. This is with the aim of articulating the most radical and concealed dimension of temporality, or ‘temporalisation’, in the primordial event of the upsurge of Being, and observing how the relation with the other is implicated in this event. Levinas observes namely the condition for the manifestation of Being to the transcendental ego, Being’s own ‘there’: the condition in other words of the *cycle* of Being, or the process in which being must manifest itself to itself. Such a *process* of manifestation to itself cannot as such occur as an instantaneous ‘fulguration’, but implies temporality. In effect time for Levinas becomes the quality which the world of objects, and the ego as their fulcrum, wears. For Bergson the spatial dimensions of objects for human perception is as important as the qualities or attributes of these things: it is the heightened degree in which space becomes a geometrical abstraction perceived over and above the flux of sensations and qualities for humans which allows a world of discrete objects to manifest themselves as such.<sup>360</sup> Levinas argues something similar with regards to the relation between manifestation and time: ‘this “showing itself to” indicates a getting out of phase which is precisely time.’ (OB28) In the cycle through which manifestation is accomplished, in other words, the manifest world of objects betrays the subtlest and yet most decisive of modifications, a ‘modification without alteration or transition’, what Levinas describes in terms of ‘lapse’ or of ‘ageing’. (OB30) Time in effect becomes the cipher for the *existential modification* of our relation to the world: the movement from immersion in and ‘enjoyment’ of the pure qualitative flux of the world towards the self at a remove from the

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<sup>359</sup> Peperzaak, *Beyond* p100

<sup>360</sup> Bergson, H *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris, PUF, 1976) p72

world and with a questioning attitude towards the world, a seismic shift in which the pure qualitative flux becomes a stable world of objects. The ‘ageing’ of the world of discrete objects is a metaphor for this existential modification in which this world first becomes such a world, an existential modification of the stance of the subject to the world which the world of objects subsequently wears as an almost imperceptible *attribute*.

How is the other implicated in this event? The relation with the other enters as the condition, or the event at a phenomenological level, in which this world first becomes a world to be questioned: ‘manifestation . . . is discontinuous, and lasts from a question to the response.’ (OB24) The manifestation of Being, in other words, presupposes the relation of *interlocutors* across question asked and responsive given. The existential modification which manifestation presupposes is the consequence of the ‘trauma’ of the relation with the other which ‘awakens’ the ego to a questioning attitude towards the world: a world of *noemata* to be understood in terms of their *noeses*. Manifestation is the response of the self to the question of the other: it is the response to the pure question mark which the other represents within the world of the self.

The ‘proof’ of this relation to the other across the question of Being is in the very temporal character of the existential modification which produces manifestation in function of this question. The radical character of the temporality intended by Levinas here must be understood. In effect this existential modification does not simply occur in time: it is the primordial modification in which static and punctual existence first becomes temporal, in which time is produced within existence. Husserl’s *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* takes as its key problematic how objects which have temporality as part of the meaning of their objectivity, a piece of music for example, can be intended as objects. Husserl critiques Brentano’s ‘psychologistic’ interpretation of time in which the past moments are retained in the imagination and added to the present moment, or in the form of ‘echoes’ in the present, alongside the expectation of future moments in the piece of music. Belonging only to the imagination, time in effect would not as such exist: it would be an illusion.<sup>361</sup> Among other reasons, this placing of time consciousness in imagination is problematic for Husserl because it cannot take into account the distinction fundamental to all experience between the recollection of a ‘dead’ past and the retention of a still ‘living’ past in the duration of a melody. The memory of things which the imagination retains has nothing to do with the past

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<sup>361</sup> A lucid account of Husserl’s theory of time in relation to Brentano, along with the problematic elements of Husserl’s theory in general, is that of Granel, G *Le Sens du Temps et de la Perception chez E. Husserl* (Paris, Gallimard, 1968) in particular pp40-4.

which is still implicated in the present, is still present in a living fashion. Yet in order that the past still be living in such a fashion, still indeed be present in consciousness as retained, consciousness must have quite literally past time within itself. More than simply retaining a specific image *in* past time, consciousness itself is in its form the retention *of* past time itself, a primordial ‘holding back’.<sup>362</sup> In order for this to be possible, consciousness must be temporal in a quite particular and radical sense. To be precise, consciousness, in order to be able to intend intelligible durations or continuities, must itself take on the form of time. Consciousness, in order to *intend* time, must ecstatically *be* time.

We are faced with the sheer enigma, that is, of the self, a punctual point in existence like all other things, transcending its punctual status to become ‘out of phase’ with itself in order to intend time and to be temporal in the radical sense here indicated. In this ‘distension’ or stretching of the subject across a series of punctual instants, interiority is shot through with exteriority. Such a radical move of the self towards that which is exterior to its punctual status, Levinas encourages us strongly to suggest, can only take place given an *appeal* coming from exteriority: the exteriority of the world exceeding its punctual status can only become an issue for the self, residing within its interior walls indifferently like all punctual things, once this exteriority takes on the form of an appeal, or a question addressed to it. As such pure exteriority becomes the pure exteriority of the other as interlocutor, the character of whose appeal awakens the self in this radical sense. It is the temporal ‘holding back’ of a moment and of the self perceiving this moment so that it can become an intelligible duration, the intelligible ‘Here and Now’, which is behind the cycle of Being in which manifestation becomes possible. Of course it is not simply objects with duration which require this ecstatic relation to time: it is also true for each moment. Each moment of manifestation is itself temporal insofar as involved in the temporal cycle of Being. A temporally ‘dephased’ ego is required to ride against the stream of the hyletic flux into which one cannot step even once in order to ‘keep hold’ of the ‘Here and Now’ which is to manifest itself to itself. This fact allows the uncovering of the concealed yet radical event in which the punctual, indifferent self becomes quite literally other than itself, is inspired by the appeal of the other; or of otherness precisely becoming appeal or question rather than indifferent exteriority.

In effect Levinas is here returning to what constituted a principal concern of his early work: the primordial upsurge of the identity of the present moment, the birth of the primordial ‘Here

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<sup>362</sup> Husserl, E ‘A phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time’ in *The Essential Husserl: Basic Writings in Transcendental Phenomenology* ed. by Welton, D (Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 1999) pp 186-220 (p216)

and Now' - the primordial identity of consciousness or unity of apperception – against the current of the hyletic flux. As in *Existence and Existents*, this moment in *Otherwise than Being* goes by the name of 'hypostasis', or a contraction of an event, in this case of time, into a static being. The difference between *Otherwise than Being* and Levinas' early work is that this primordial upsurge of the present moment is for the latter merely the point of departure. The principal concern of *Time and the Other*, for example, is what comes after this moment. In the latter work, the upsurge of the self-identity of the pure present, as a purely self-identical and self-enclosed punctuation, is considered indeed as *atemporal*. (TO81) Time must *subsequently* be donated from outside to this consciousness enclosed in the prison of its own self-identity, the prison of the pure identity of the 'Here and Now'. This donated time, to recall, is the messianic time of the future, the time of the pure surprise which the other as feminine represents. Messianism here constitutes the fashion in which the self is opened to time beyond itself as most essentially the time of the future. In effect this messianism of the future drops out of view in *Otherwise than Being* because Levinas is now concerned with the concealed temporality of the moment of hypostasis itself, that in other words which in *Time and the Other* was considered atemporal, in messianic need of time. It is as such that the focus of *Otherwise than Being* turns from the radical future to that of the radical past: it represents a turn to the concealed temporality of that which previously had been presented as atemporal.

Another character of this concealed temporality is worth noting insofar as its suitability for any messianic model of time is concerned. Levinas frames this temporality in terms of a contrast: on the one hand, there is the time of projects, memory and history; and yet subtending this there is an exposure to raw time, the pure non-subjective time of 'ageing' and 'lapse'. At work here is not any Bergsonian *durée*: Levinas' 'diachrony' has nothing to do with time as an organic, internal and intensive growth set against time rendered as an externalised, homogenous substance on the model of space. There is nothing internal or organic about this pure asubjective time: it is a consciousness of time comparable to a door banging open and shut as the wind rushes into the interior of the house. It represents an exposure to the meaningless *par excellence* rushing into the 'organism' of the self: 'an overflowing of meaning by nonsense', the 'nonsense' of raw time as raw exteriority leaking into consciousness. (OB64) If Levinas appears to echo the contrast which Bergson establishes between time rendered as quantifiable space and the authentic time of *durée*, it is important to note from the outset that in this exposure to raw lapse underlying biographical or historical, i.e. spatialized time, *time* once more becomes indistinguishable to the pure exposure to raw

*space*: space as abstract ‘worldlessness’, as the antithesis of the meaningful, holistic horizon which the self constructs of the world.

It is not necessarily counter-intuitive to return to this radical past, or to the concealed temporality of the moment of the hypostasis of the present, as the basis of an authentic phenomenology of inter-subjectivity. Husserl’s phenomenology of internal time consciousness after all serves likewise as the basis for Schultz’s phenomenology of society, in which the intersubjective synchronization of lapse, the solidarity involved in the synchronized ‘ageing together’ of two subjects, serves as the zero point of all sociality.<sup>363</sup> The question remains, however, to what extent the intersubjective horizon as such is still messianic, whether indeed the changed focus of *Otherwise than Being* towards this diachrony is not symptomatic of a turn away from the dimension in which the introduction of messianism into the phenomenological perspective took on intelligibility.

What we are presented with in effect in *Otherwise than Being* are the fragments of a messianic discourse, remnants which become metaphors with thoroughly displaced significations. The theme of ‘prophecy’ has, as Levinas himself states, has nothing to do with oracular access to the future: it concerns rather the manner in which the self is able to hear and bear witness to a purely heterological appeal, an interiority to exteriority. (DQVI152) The theme of ‘patience’, to wait in hope ‘even though he may tarry’ which as we observed is central to Levinas’s rabbinic informed notion of messianism, is another case in point. It is true that in a sense patience is *already* a messianic value for Levinas, becoming a cipher for the assumption of humanity itself of the completion of the messianic task: ‘Man is also the irruption of God in Being or the fragmenting of Being towards God, writes Levinas, ‘man can do what he must do, he can master the hostile forces of history and realize a messianic reign announced by the prophets; the expectation of the Messiah is the very duration of time.’ (BV172) The very ‘expectation’ of the ‘Most High’ is in itself already a form of relation with Him: it orientates the self towards the task which the divine has set out for him. Yet in what sense does this already messianic relation across the unfaltering expectation of and patience for the coming of the Messiah signify in *Otherwise than Being*? The notion of patience is indeed essential to *Otherwise than Being*. It takes on, however, a transformed sense: ‘the passivity proper to patience, more passive thus than any passivity that is correlative to the voluntary, signifies in the “passive” synthesis of its temporality.’ (OBBE51) ‘Patience’, that is,

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<sup>363</sup> Schultz, A *On Phenomenology and Social Relation* ed. by Wagner, H, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1970)

loses here any messianic sense: it becomes an expression for the moment where consciousness loses its punctual existence or subsistence to take on the 'weight' of temporality as such, of duration or lapse. It becomes one with the notion of 'ageing': subjectivity 'is in the form of the *being* of the entity, the diachronic temporality of ageing.'(OBBE53) Patience is no longer patience before the deferred future time of the Kingdom of God, that is, but rather merely the undergoing by consciousness of the dimension of time as such, the trauma of pure asubjective time in which there is not yet fundamentally any past, present or future but simply 'lapse'.

Accompanying indeed the displacement of the dimension of patience for the Kingdom of God is a displacement of the notion of the Kingdom of God towards which patience was to be directed:

The Good that reigns in its goodness cannot enter into the present of consciousness, even if it would be remembered. In consciousness it is an-anarchy. The Biblical notion of the Kingdom of God . . . signifies in the form of the proximity of a neighbour and the duty of an unpayable debt, the form of the finite condition. Temporality as ageing and death of the unique one signifies an obedience where there is no desertion. (OBBE52)

The 'Kingdom of God' is conflated precisely with the dimension of 'patience' for this Kingdom. The time of the kingdom of God no longer signifies the expected future of redemption, but the raw asubjective time of 'lapse'. The Kingdom of God as such indeed becomes one with 'ageing' and 'death'.(OBBE68) The 'goodness' of the subject in which it 'enters' this Kingdom is in taking on the 'weight' of time in the process in which it loses its punctual existence before the appeal of the other.

The dimension of the infinite desire for the other in which in *Totality and Infinity* the subject frees itself from the dimension of history, and in which the horizon of 'eschatological peace' opened, is notable in *Otherwise than Being* in its absence. Infinity as the cipher for the divine remains, yet of the desire with which this dimension was implicated there is very little mentioned. We find indeed one of the sections of the fifth chapter entitled 'From the Saying to the Said, or the Wisdom of Desire'. However we in fact quite surprisingly find no mention made of desire at all within this section. The infinite no longer signifies as 'desire' but principally as 'enigma' of that which lies 'on the hither side' of the border crossed in which subjectivity assumes the 'weight' of its self-identity, time and responsibility for the other.(OBBE146) The infinite embodies, that is, not *desire* but the enigma of a *command*, the command precisely to cross this border. On desire in *Otherwise than Being* we find elsewhere



the one notable utterance: ‘obligations are disproportionate to any commitment taken or to be taken or to be kept in a present. In a sense nothing is more burdensome than a neighbour. Is not the desired one the undesirable itself?’ (OBBE88) The other here slips between the ambiguity of the desirable and undesirable. The other is undesirable in the sense of representing the site of a trauma of a radical exposure and the weight of a responsibility with which subjectivity is ‘enigmatically’ loaded.

Desire does, however, remain a topic of consideration in later works of Levinas. In the essay ‘God and Philosophy’, another product of Levinas’ mature period, we discover that the other as ‘non-desirable’ is the necessary detour which desire for the infinite, or for the divine, takes, so that this desire may become ethical. The ‘desirable’ deflects us from itself, in order to maintain and indeed heighten the glory of its transcendence: ‘in order for the disinterestedness be possible in the desire for the infinite, in order for the desirable or God to remain separate in the desire . . . the Desirable orders me to that which is non-desirable, to the undesirable par excellence, to the other person. (DQVII13) Firstly, it is worth noting that this notion of an ethical detour which the desire for the infinite ‘must’ take is evidently *theological* in the speculative and entirely non-phenomenological sense, perhaps the reason why it is not and possibly cannot be included in *Otherwise than Being*. Secondly, it still betrays the breakdown of the rigorous correlation between the ‘Idea of the Infinite’ and the face of the other based on the fact that the relation to *both* was one of an infinitely increasing desire. This break down is symptomatic of the more general shift in orientation of *Otherwise than Being*, in which the other person no longer appears as the messianic gateway to the *opening* of the eschatological horizon of the infinite, but rather as the scar of a past wound or trauma which has never fully *closed*.

In the lecture series *God, Death and Time*, it is true, we find a hybrid of the Levinas of *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, one in which the theme of ‘desire’ for the other stands side by side with themes of ‘lapse’, ‘ageing’ and ‘patience’, all of that associated with the thematic of non-desirability. It would appear as such that the line between the ‘desirable’ and ‘undesirable’ in Levinas is thin and that as such both terms remain essentially ambiguous. The waters are also muddied somewhat by the introduction in *God, Death and Time* of the formula of ‘expectation without anything expected’ (‘attendre sans attendu’) to describe the pure experience of temporality. (DMT131) There is no longer to be a messianism of the end of time, that is, but a messianism of time as such, of the experience of pure temporality underlying biographically or historically fashioned time. Yet amongst the diversity of possible theologemes available for expressing the relation to transcendence across

temporality, would messianism be the most suitable for this experience of time as pure asubjective 'lapse'? It is also true that although the horizon of the future disappears from *Otherwise than Being* along with the metaphysics of desire, in another work Levinas does explore the fashion in which the obligation which the face of the other awakens opens in parallel fashion to desire the horizon of a radical future, insofar as like desire it increases infinitely and posit its completion thus in the infinite future. (EN224) In addition, Levinas in another late work writes of the prophetic character of the command of the divine as the 'unparalleled way in which, absolutely irreversible, the future commands the present.' (AT34) The relation with the 'future' here is, as Levinas himself observes elsewhere, a metaphor for relation with 'heteronomy'. These metaphors cannot cover over the 'closure', as Vanni puts it, of the horizon 'of hope and of the future', of the fact that 'no gift comes to inscribe itself as promise or as future' in *Otherwise than Being*, in face of which all talk of 'inspiration' and 'prophecy' in this work falls flat.<sup>364</sup> The fragments of the horizon of the future scattered throughout Levinas' later essays can conceal no more, as Vanni notes, that time has lost the 'fecundity' intrinsic to all previous articulations of messianism in Levinas work, a disappearance which occurs in the face of the rise to dominance of the thematic of temporality as 'ageing'.<sup>365</sup>

Could it be that all these transformations are necessary to the paradigm of the messianism of the 'suffering servant'? Are perhaps these displaced remnants of messianism not precisely its most authentic form of expression? It is perhaps the case that we are over-emphasising the importance of the horizon of the future for the articulation of any messianism. Agamben, for example, warns against any fixation on the dimension of the future: 'the representation which would see messianic time as orientated exclusively towards the future is false.'<sup>366</sup> Agamben's account of messianism is informed to a large extent by Benjamin's philosophy of history in which the messianic 'Now time' is conceived as principally a contraction of past and present, or as the 'recapitulation' of the past in the present. It involves a model of messianic time where the *historical* past contains potentialities, anachronistic and stunted redemptive powers, which refer beyond themselves towards the historical present, presenting potentialities which are our task to fulfil. There is nothing of this in Levinas, for whom historical time is already a form of neutralised or managed and hence essential non-messianic time. Yet is it perhaps the case that the stripping of expectation from patience exposed in its raw form as exposure to

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<sup>364</sup> Vanni, *Impatience des Reponses* p165

<sup>365</sup> *Ibid* p164

<sup>366</sup> Agamben, *G Le Temps Qui Reste: Un Commentaire de l'Épître aux Romains* (Paris, Editions Payot et Rivages, 2004) p136/7

‘lapse’, and the disappearance of the horizon of ‘desire’ in face of the full exposure to the ‘non-desirable’ is necessary to the messianic paradigm of the self as ‘suffering servant’? This is how, to recall, Ajenstat framed ‘messianic consciousness’ in Levinas: ‘the ethical subject is perhaps always friendless, abjectly poor, tortured, and finally put to death. Every ethical encounter is a limit case. To be ethical is to be unhappy. But it is also to be happy to be unhappy. The love of the neighbour, the suffering for his suffering, is the reproach of God and also the love of God.’<sup>367</sup> Is not this suffering for nothing and the disappearance of messianic hope a necessary part of the burden of this ‘messianic consciousness’ in taking on its infinite task? Yet in fact why is this paradigm of the ‘suffering servant’ necessary for *Otherwise than Being*? As we interrogated the messianism of the master-disciple relation in *Totality and Infinity* as to its global function in this text, so we will interrogate the messianism of the ‘suffering servant’ in *Otherwise than Being*. Underlying messianism in *Totality and Infinity*, to recall, was a certain humanistic vision. In order to answer the question of the function of messianism in *Otherwise than Being*, that is, we need to ask another question: what has happened to humanism in *Otherwise than Being*?

### Otherwise than Humanism

*Otherwise than Being* is characterised, we noted, by a further radicalisation of the strategy of the sanctification of the human, in response perhaps to the critique of Derrida. Levinas’ phenomenology of intersubjectivity goes beyond that of Schultz, for example, insofar as for the latter the relation with the other amounts to reciprocity against the background of internal time, precisely the conviviality involved in the synchronizing of heterogeneous internal times. The self and the other become co-conspirators set against their shared subjection to a subjective ‘lapse’ and ‘ageing’. For Levinas, on the contrary, the primordial meaning of the relation with the other is not articulated against the background of this time, but is one with the meaning, or absence of meaning, of this time for subjectivity. Levinas searches for *pure* exposure, and the purest form of exposure is that of the diachrony of pure ‘lapse’. The relation with the other person is to take place at the level of what for Levinas is a passive synthesis of time ‘beneath’ the active consciousness of intentionality. The pure exteriority of the exposure to the asubjective in internal time consciousness and the otherness of the other person are to come from the same site and are to have the same meaning. This is the result of the drive in

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<sup>367</sup> Ajenstat, *Driven Back to the Text* p331

Levinas' work towards a purified or sanctified humanism, one free of all violence, or at least all non-sanctified violence of the 'same'. Yet what humanism can be constructed on the basis of such a both inhuman and non-human 'exposure' and 'vulnerability' however pure it might be?

Bergo notices that in *Otherwise than Being*, there is no actual concern with articulating the principle of sociality between self and other, a sociality which we have noted is articulated in *Totality and Infinity* in terms of the master-disciple anthropology.<sup>368</sup> Such an articulation becomes in effect redundant once the point of pure exposure of the self to other has been found, this 'exposure to all the winds.' Bergo, however, registers the consequences of this for *Otherwise than Being*: the concept of the other, she writes, is to such an extent strained that it here appears to divide into the "other-in-the-same" and the "neighbour."<sup>369</sup> The 'other in the same' is the other at the point of pure exposure and vulnerability at the underside of the transcendental ego; the 'neighbour' is the interlocutor to whom one relates in direct 'face to face' manner, precisely the humanism articulated in *Totality and Infinity* via the imported master-disciple anthropology. Bergo registers here the tension between the exposure to the *otherness* of pure exteriority, or as Vanni puts it this 'poorly defined and protean cloud' ('nuage mal défini et protéiforme') be it human, non-human or whatever else, and the *humanism* of the relation with the *other person*.<sup>370</sup> The intelligibility of the latter, however, is in *Otherwise than Being*, nonetheless to be articulated in terms of that of the former: the former is to *resolve* into the latter. It is worth exploring the paradigm of the 'suffering servant' further in terms of this tension.

*Otherwise than Being*, like *Totality and Infinity*, is centred on the vision of a certain metaphysics of expression. We observed how messianism in *Totality and Infinity* was in function of the need for 'frankness' or 'straightforwardness' in the relation between the self and the other, set against the ambiguity, unintelligibility, equivocality of the relation in the third person. The relation with the other signified the messianic 'straightforwardness' of the direct face to face relation, both *short-circuiting* the hermeneutical detour which society - the third - imposes and *catching up* eschatologically with the dimension of interiority withdrawing from society as the third. *Otherwise than Being* has to contend, we noted, with Derrida's critique of any notion of a pure, non-violent language. A language without violence would be for Derrida self-contradictory: it would be a language without any content at all, a

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<sup>368</sup> Bergo, *Between Ethics and Politics* pp95-7

<sup>369</sup> *Ibid* p161

<sup>370</sup> Vanni, *Impatience des Réponses* p76

language entirely empty and without signification. In *Otherwise than Being*, therefore, Levinas articulates in greater depth that dimension already implicit in *Totality and Infinity*. In *Totality and Infinity* the fundamental significance of language must already be ‘disengaged from its density as a linguistic product’. (TI177) There is a layer of meaning in language ‘pure’ of all the ambiguity and violence of content, a layer of meaning which is not entirely meaningless and without content because it expresses its own content. Given the provocation of Derrida, Levinas undertakes to render more precise this fundamental layer of language which subtends all specific content: that which is expressed in language before anything specific is stated, the layer of meaning in language more ancient than of the ‘violence’ of linguistic content. The distinction between language as the ‘density of the linguistic product’, as content, and as expression is sharpened into the distinction between the ‘saying’ and the ‘said’ in *Otherwise than Being*: ‘is not the inescapable fate in which being immediately includes the statement of being’s *other* not due to the hold the *said* has over the *saying* . . . ?’ (OBBE5) Language as violence is the said, whilst the non-violent layer of language is the saying. The saying is the fundamental layer of language which is subsequently ‘alienated’ in the content of the said. (OBBE143) The saying may always be betrayed in the said to the extent that even the attempt to draw attention to the dimension of the saying is a betrayal of it; yet for Levinas the saying is nonetheless the foundation of each utterance in language and it makes itself felt despite the contradictory efforts to define it within language. The said represents language as a system of signs signifying specific objects and meanings; the saying represents the giving of these signs to another in the proximity of exposure to this other. (OBBE62) Alternatively, the saying represents the diachrony of internal time, the assuming of temporality and thus dephasing of the punctual identity of the self, whilst the said represents the synchrony of time mastered as a coherent phase already seen through as a synchronized noematic aspect.

The force of Levinas’ repost to Derrida is that expression is not simply the carrier of specific significations, but itself embodies its own unique signification and that, although this signification, or ‘signifyingness’ cannot be detached from the said, it is by no means meaningless on its own account. This primordial meaning of language in *Totality and Infinity* remains somewhat abstract, articulated simply as the fact that ‘expression is its own content’. In *Otherwise than Being* this meaning is refined so as to embody a more specific sense. That which is before and which accompanies all particular signification, is, according to Levinas the biblically inspired avowal by the subject before the visitation of the other of ‘Here I am’: an expression of the pure opening of self to other and availability of self for other. The

expression of 'Here I am' before another person constitutes the primordial, pure, non-violent substrate of all language. This primordial meaning of the saying is given various significations in *Otherwise than Being*. In general it signifies the inescapability of responsibility of self before the other to the extent of being responsible for all the faults of the other and for all others, or as the 'substitution' of the self for the other. 'Here I am' thus in general signifies the assumption of the self of the task of the 'suffering servant'.

This intelligibility, however, represents only the tip of the iceberg of the Saying, something of its effervescence. Ultimately, the Saying in Levinas is not in fact fully meaningful or intelligible, but represents rather the dynamic of the *crossing into* intelligibility, the crossing from sensibility into language. 'In the approach of a face, the flesh becomes word, the caress a saying' writes Levinas.(OBBE94) Expression stands between flesh and word, caress and saying: the approach of the other stands 'enigmatically' on the border between the touch of the other's breath and the other's posing of a question. On the one hand, sensibility is always already on the road to intelligibility, at the provocation of the other, whilst, on the other hand, intelligibility never escapes from sensible exposure to the other. On the one hand, in sensibility as the moment of unity with the *hyletic* flux, there is always already the intentionality of time in which consciousness has left behind sensation in making of it the identity of a 'Here and Now' moment. On the other hand, the object mastered and identified can never escape from the flux of sensibility in which it appears. The fact that expression is not simply expression of intelligibility, but between sensibility and intelligibility, means that for it 'expression' no longer entirely seems the most appropriate definition: 'light . . . resounds for the "eye that listens", with a resonance unique in its kind, a resonance of silence.' (OBBE31) As opposed to expression, saying becomes '*resonance*': the bulk of Saying occurs below, that is, the threshold of *expression*, in the sense that the latter is tied to a sense of lyrical overture and of oratory 'frankness'; Saying is more primordially defined as a certain 'resonance', or the product of a certain *harmonics*.

The harmonics of sensibility and intelligibility in which Saying 'resonates' rather than is expressed is the product of the drama of which *Otherwise than Being* represents the performance. We noted that the exposure to the other represents both 'trauma' and 'inspiration'. The drama around which *Otherwise than Being* revolves is namely articulated around the play of these two terms. The pure exposure to exteriority does not simply 'traumatise', it also 'inspires':

The proximity of the neighbour in its trauma does not only strike up against me, and in the literal sense of the term, inspires me. Inspiration, heteronomy, is the very pneuma of the psyche. (OBBE124)

The privileged character of the relation with the other, is in that fact the proximity of the neighbour represents not only the physical trauma of ‘striking up against’ but also ‘inspiration’: the trauma of the presence of otherness within the world of the self is transfigured into a *question* posed about this world signifying *intelligibly*, the physical and indeed mechanistic trauma of the other comes *enigmatically* to signify the ‘what?’ of the Being of this world. The ‘resonance’ of saying represents the oscillation between ‘trauma’ and ‘inspiration’, between *recoil* before a *trauma* and *response* to a *question*. The border crossing from sensibility to intelligibility is part of this larger pneumatic drama. The ‘resonance’ of saying is pneumatic: that is, it oscillates, trills, between *breath*, the other as sensible trauma, and *speech*, the other as intelligible question mark. The Saying ‘Here I am’ signifies most fundamentally the *pneumatic* event or drama in which the pure *animal* recoil before the shock of the alien presence of the other becomes the *human* response to the question which the presence of this other poses and indeed embodies.

The metaphysics of ‘expression’ becomes the metaphysics of ‘resonance’: it charts the passage from sensible exposure to intelligible question, within the passage from trauma to inspiration, from animal recoil to human response. Precisely in the heightening of the sanctification of the human, that is, Levinas’ humanism now has to contend with the *non-human*: ‘there is indeed an insurmountable ambiguity here: the incarnate ego . . . can be affirmed as an animal in its conatus and joy. It is a dog that recognizes as its own Ulysses coming to take possession of his goods.’ (OB79/80) Being exposed to the other at the phenomenological level of sensibility and enjoyment, the self becomes Ulysses’ dog recognising the other as his returning master. In another mature work, Levinas argues against the reduction of the animal to the satisfaction of hungers; there is another dimension of the animal, at least insofar as the animal substratum of the human is concerned: ‘is not the animal realm of the human also the bursting of the “gesture” of being which carries all being with it?’ (SH10) It is at the animal level of the ego that enjoyment of the world experiences its inversion into giving to the other. Next to the expression, the complications of which we have already noted, of the ‘humanity of the human’ we have now the expression ‘the animal realm of the human.’ The doubling of the element of ‘humanity’ in the sanctification of the human must now take place on the same site as the doubling up of ‘humanity’ with the dimension of

‘animality’. The response to the other is both a human and animal response, and humanism in Levinas must come to terms with the play between such incommensurable forces.

This play indeed introduces another incommensurable force with which humanism in Levinas must equally contend. Levinas in this work *observes* the passage from or oscillation between nonhuman and human; yet he cannot *explain* this passage. He cannot explain *why* the other causes the self to pass from or oscillate between sensibility and intelligibility, trauma and inspiration. The problem arises as to what force necessitates this passage. As animal, what necessitates that the self hear the command to become human? This necessity can be addressed only via appeal to another force.

In *Otherwise than Being*, the neologism ‘Illeity’, ‘He-ness’, is introduced, to indicate the manner in which God is implicated in the relation with the other. One does not relate to God as a ‘direct’ interlocutor but rather as one who ‘passes by’ indirectly, in the third person as ‘He’, in the context of the ‘direct’ relation with the other as interlocutor. God appears within the relation with the other as a trace, as a further trace of that which the other represents itself, ‘a trace within a trace’. Rather than signifying as *desire*, we noted, the infinite in *Otherwise than Being* becomes rather the site of an *enigma*. We might indeed say that the infinite is a predicate of the enigma rather than the reverse. In other words, it is only due to the extent of the enigma that the enigma can then be considered the trace of the infinite:

The face of the other in proximity, which is more than representation, is an unrepresentable trace, the way of the infinite. It is not because among beings there exists an ego, a being pursuing ends, that being takes on signification and becomes a universe. It is because in an approach, there is inscribed or written the trace of infinity, the trace of a departure . . . that there is forsakenness of the other, obsession by him, responsibility and a self.(OBBE117)

The crucial phrase here is ‘being taking on signification’ and ‘becoming a universe’, and the target is, as in *Totality and Infinity*, Heidegger. The ego could not produce signification in autarkical fashion from within itself. The question here is that of how phenomenologically a *common* horizon of *shared* significations, rather than a solipsistic horizon in which the other is a mere obstacle or means, could arise spontaneously from a world of incommensurable and primordially silent monads: only the passing of the infinite, suggests Levinas, could explain the sheer spontaneity of this arising, of the awakening into meaning and intelligibility by virtue of the mere presence of the other. ‘In the splendid indifference of radiant being, there is a, overwhelming of this being into sense.’ (OBBE97) One moment we have the ‘abyss of transcendence’, a pure vacuum of incommensurable, self-interested, punctual monads; the



next moment we have a world of objects who gain their meaning not solely from the transcendental ego but where this ego intends these objects on the basis of a shared inter-subjective horizon. We have in other words, the world as site of fraternity: a ‘complicity for nothing, a fraternity, a proximity that is possible only as an openness of self’, the entering into language, a shared world, in which the self becomes inescapably bound to others. (OBBE151) The trace of infinity appears by virtue of this ‘paradox’ in which the self apparently spontaneously binds itself to another, from which binding the shared dimension of language arises. (OBBE121) From the impossibility and spontaneity of this transition, of the birth of signification as if *ex nihilo* from the presence of another, Levinas *deduces* the passing of infinity.

In fact we already noticed the implicit presence of this divine resonance underlying the messianic ‘straightforwardness’ of the master-disciple anthropology by virtue of which society as a whole was rendered intelligible in *Totality and Infinity*. More specifically, we noted in the last chapter that master-disciple anthropology by which the ‘straightforwardness’ of expression was articulated is implicitly undergirded by the metaphysics of a revelation without content, or a revelation in which the divine reveals or expresses nothing but itself. That which is implicit in the metaphysics of expression in *Totality and Infinity*, that which implicitly renders possible the ‘straightforwardness’ and ‘frankness’ of the relation with the other, is in *Otherwise than Being* rendered explicit and as such undermines this ‘straightforwardness’. A radically *equivocal* character is as such donated to the humanism of the I-other relation, that which precisely was to be defined as a primordial ‘straightforwardness’. Levinas expresses this equivocal character as follows: ‘does this confer upon me a new identity, that of being the unique chosen one? Or does this exclusive election, as signification of the Infinite, *reduce* me to the status of an articulation in its divine economy?’ (OB153) (My italics) The unique and irreplaceable I, and the irreducible, unencompassable relation with the other in which it is born, are ‘reduced’ to a certain ‘economy’ or intrigue’. Levinas explains the pneumatic border crossing which places the humanism of the relation between individuals within a divine economy or intrigue as follows:

The ego stripped by the trauma of persecution of its scornful and imperialist subjectivity is reduced to the “here I am”, in a transparency without opaqueness, without heavy zones propitious for evasion. “Here I am” as a witness to the Infinite, but a witness that does not thematize what it bears witness of, and whose truth is not the truth of representation, is not evidence. There is witness, a unique structure, an exception to the rule of being, irreducible to representation, only of the infinite. The Infinite does not appear to him that bears witness to it. On the contrary the witness

belongs to the glory of the Infinite. It is by the voice of the witness that the glory of the Infinite is glorified. (OB146)

In the 'transparency without opaqueness' we can see still the 'straightforwardness' of *Totality and Infinity*; yet it here absorbed into a larger economy, one in which the ego namely bears 'witness' to the Infinite. This 'bearing witness' does not involve a revelation of the infinite we are told: the 'Infinite does not appear' to the witness. On the contrary, it is the witness who '*belongs*' to the Infinite, to the 'glory' of the Infinite. This glory signifies in the act of transfiguration: the 'animation' of sensibility by intelligibility, animality by humanity. This moment '*belongs*' to the infinite, as a '*structure*', albeit a 'unique' structure: a structure apparently incommensurable with those of 'linguistics, psychology, sociology etc'. It is a unique structure insofar as constituting the birth of the possibility of structure and of repeatability in relations from nothing, from the apparent absence of any pre-existing structure or substance. Yet like these repeatable structures, this prime structure takes us beyond the 'straightforwardness' of the self-other relation. Besides and in tension with the sincerity to the point of the 'breaking up of inwardness' is the saying as an 'ambiguous or enigmatic way of speaking.'(OBBE7) The saying on either side of intelligibility is invested with a 'power', the power of the 'enigma whose secret it keeps'.(OBBE9) The 'enigma' of saying at the birth of signification in which a self is exposed to another implies equally the 'ambiguous' possibility of 'non-sense invading and threatening signification.'(OBBE50)

In other words, *Otherwise than Being*, in reducing the metaphysics of expression to resonance, the master-disciple anthropology to the divine pneumatics which echoes in the background, overturns the humanism of *Totality and Infinity*. Whilst the infinite remains tied to the dimension of signification which the face of the other embodies, the dynamic between the infinite and the face has been radically transformed. Formerly, the face was the 'concrete event' of the advent of the infinite, and indeed opened this dimension in the invoking of infinite desire. In *Otherwise than Being*, however, the face appears as somewhat of the *product* of the dynamic of the infinite. Take for example the following:

The *Illeity* in the beyond-being is the fact that its coming towards me is a departure which lets me accomplish a movement towards a neighbour.(OBBE13)

Rather than the face of the neighbour being the 'concrete event' of the infinite, as in *Totality and Infinity*, the infinite appears here as the *condition of possibility* of approach towards the neighbour. In a slightly different fashion, Levinas writes of the 'obedience to the glory of the

Infinite that orders me to another.’(OBBE146) The face of the other, rather than being the opening of the horizon of the infinite or its ‘concrete event’ now appears to be rather the culmination of a dynamic in which approaching the other is both rendered possible and commanded. The *approach* of the other takes on a life of its own relative to the other who approaches, or the face becomes the congealed product of this approach: ‘starting with the approach, the description finds the neighbour bearing the trace of a withdrawal that orders it as a face.’(OBBE121) The exposure to pure non human exteriority only subsequently *resolves* itself, or ‘orders’ itself, into the human face of another ‘thanks to God’.

The face comes to appear as a fossil of the immemorial past of a social principle, the ‘enigma’ of the infinite, which has already withdrawn. Caygill has suggested that the third person of *Illeity* would serve as a better foundation for a political theory derived from Levinas than the third party which is articulated subsequent to the more primordial relation with the other as in *Totality and Infinity*.<sup>371</sup> It indeed appears that this is what Levinas ultimately suggests to us in *Otherwise than Being*. Before society as the advent of the third party, there is already the compulsion of the third in the relation with the other. Take for example the following description of the infinite: ‘Nothing is more imperative than this abandon in the emptiness of space, this trace of infinity which passes without being able to enter. In it is hollowed out the face as a trace of an absence, as a skin with wrinkles.’(OBBE93) The trace of the infinite represents society as the ‘emptiness of space’, as ‘void’. Society is here ‘empty’ of social substance because the infinite which has brought society into existence has already passed from it, is already absent. As Bloechl puts it, ‘the community in advance will be conditioned by the withdrawal of the absolute’.<sup>372</sup> The face of the other and of all others appears as that which is *left over* from this withdrawal. The face is that which is as such ‘ageing’, ‘with wrinkles’, is a mask - possibly a funerary mask. The faces of all the others in society in *Otherwise than Being* are in effect the detritus left behind and left exposed after an enigmatic tide has withdrawn.

As such it is possible to understand the role of the paradigm of the ‘suffering servant’ in *Otherwise than Being*. Levinas namely uncovers a transversal humanism: the ‘humanity of the human’ shot through by different trajectories, principally the nonhuman and transhuman. The human appears as the product of such forces. In face of this the *humanism* of direct ‘face to face relations’ appears as something of the effervescence, takes on a distinctly passive role: what *bubbles* to the surface are precisely the *faces* of others in society. The human finds itself

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<sup>371</sup> Caygill, Levinas and the Political p146

<sup>372</sup> Bloechl, Liturgy of the Other p252

ready made as the product of the forces of the nonhuman and the transhuman: the human *undergoes* these forces. The ‘suffering servant’, as the one who most essentially *undergoes*, serves the function nonetheless of rendering intelligible this passivity of the human within a humanistic paradigm. The model of the suffering servant is after all the model par excellence in which the height of passivity is transformed into a form of activity and efficacy, in which undergoing is given a specific human intelligibility. Articulated in the context of *Otherwise than Being*, this passivity as a form of efficacy is used to integrate within a single humanistic model forces which would appear to be incommensurable with each other and with any humanistic model. Such incommensurable forces can nonetheless still be articulated in humanistic terms via the suffering servant paradigm, insofar as the human can be seen as that which ‘bears’ these incommensurable forces, those of its own ‘humanity’. The suffering servant of deuterio-Isaiah ‘bears the iniquities’ of others (Isaiah 53:11); the ‘suffering servant’ of Levinas ‘bears’ the forces of the non-human and the trans-human. What becomes of messianism once it has taken on such a role?

#### Sanctification/Fetishisation of the Human

Before we can appreciate this, a further observation is necessary regarding how the central dynamics of sanctification and underlying it fetishisation of the human are at work here. *Otherwise than Being* is determined, we suggested, by a certain intensification of the dynamic of the sanctification of the human. As such, there is something of a denouement in which sanctification reveals the fetishisation underlying it. Sanctification we have observed, is tied to the dynamic of separation or setting apart of the human, to the creating a ‘place of refuge’ for the human, a *sanctus* of the human. This is revealed in one of Levinas’ stock phrases, the ‘humanity of the human’: between the ‘humanity’ and the ‘human’ there is to be an interval; and yet the humanity is nonetheless to express what is most essential about the human. In *Totality and Infinity* this interval is negotiated, the ‘human’ communicates to its ‘humanity’, to its displaced core, across the ‘*conversation*’ between master and disciple. In *Otherwise than Being*, the problematic character of the sanctification of the human, any such notion of an interval between the humanity of the human and the human itself, is revealed in the dynamic whereby the humanity of the human here becomes fully *separated* from the human.

The ‘humanity’ of the human becomes separated from this ‘human’ namely in the form of Illeity: the divine. Bloechl recognises this: ‘the Il of ileity is Levinas’ name for the fact that all of this is ordained by the absoluteness of the absolute, which no thought can accommodate.

Have we yet understood how this actually works in the consciousness which – there is no way around it – must somehow take it up, speaking under its instruction? At best Levinas seems only to confirm the pertinence of this question.’ Bloechl outlines the problematic character of the attempt to explain how exposure to pure exteriority takes on ethical significance by that which is itself inexplicable, the command of divinity or of ‘Illeity’. Bloechl notes the separation of the authority of the other and the source from which this authority comes: the passing in the third person of the infinite. ‘The human face is a command and not simply a threat or a challenge because it awakens me to a proximity in which there is an enigmatic trace of the absolute . . . This means that the condition for the possibility of Levinas’ ethics – the ethics of infinite responsibility and insatiable desire – is a lack of any positive relation to final authority.’<sup>373</sup> In *Totality and Infinity* it was the face of the other, the expression of the face, which was to embody a certain judgement, an ‘ethical junction’ *in itself*: as opposed to Sartre’s gaze of the other from *Being and Nothingness* in which the relation with the other opens up a constant Hegelian battle between selves who can subjectify themselves only in objectifying the other, the other in Levinas from the outset was to objectify the self with its gaze only in calling it to a responsibility which was in any case the most essential meaning of its subjectivity. This is no longer the case in *Otherwise than Being*. In attempting to get to the bottom of why his and not Sartre’s other represents the most primordial meaning of alterity, in attempting to articulate the intelligibility of the *pure* injunction which the other is to embody, *Otherwise than Being*, Bloechl argues, goes entirely beyond the other. The judge is no longer the other, the other as the displaced core of the humanism of the self; another judge works enigmatically in the background: ‘This, it must be said, is the final legacy of Levinas’ turn against the Sartrean imaginary relation to a relation in which even imagination and spontaneity are submitted to the otherness of the other. The price of that radical ethicization it now turns out, is a foreclosure of the figure of authority. Hence the real shock of Levinas’ ethics: not only is my responsibility infinite, endless and merciless, but this is to be my fate without there having been any contact between me and my judge. Not only does everything rest on my shoulders alone, but this is so according to a verdict reaching me from wholly outside my existence and experience. There is nothing in me that has anything to do with the fact that at bottom, and always, I am one-for-the-other and not for myself.’<sup>374</sup> Levinas’ work ultimately finds itself in the quandary of articulating a humanism from that which separates itself and sets itself apart from the human in all senses: both from the humanism of the self,

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<sup>373</sup> Ibid p245/6

<sup>374</sup> Ibid

that of the autonomous, rational ego, *and* from the humanism of the other to whom the self relates in 'direct' 'face to face' fashion. Humanism is no longer the communication or *conversation* to the human, to the self as disciple, of its own humanity, that coming from the other, the master: 'conversation' with such a radically separated principle of humanity is no longer possible. In place of the 'straightforward' conversation between the human and its humanity we have the 'enigmatic' collusion of nonhuman and transhuman towards the *production* of the human.

The fetishisation of the humanism shows itself precisely in the *overshooting* of humanism in a text structured according to the search for the most radical core of the human: the radical search for the human goes beyond the human, arriving at the non-human and transhuman. The humanity of the human was to be radicalised or sanctified precisely because it was under risk, in need of a place of refuge. *Otherwise than Being* betrays the fully paradoxical character of such a motive, that of the glorifying or setting apart of the human in order to save it from destruction, a *sanctus* which doubles as a place of refuge. We noted how for Althusser, humanism remains as a fetish once it has been stripped of any intelligibility or content. Levinas' work betrays fully the problematic character of attempting to give intelligibility to such a fetish. The intelligibility of the human in itself remains in *Otherwise than Being*, as in *Totality and Infinity*, radically elusive.

In *Totality and Infinity* this elusiveness was managed through the 'conversation' between disciple and master, humanism and its displaced core, a conversation which by virtue of the character of the human as fetish must be framed as a 'messianic' conversation. In *Otherwise than Being* this conversation and thus strictly speaking messianism are no longer possible. Other means are thus required to negotiate this fetish character.

### Messianism and Parody a) The Face and Reminiscence

The principle dynamic in Levinas' work, the point around which the correlation between 'Judaism' and 'philosophy' takes place, is not that of messianism but of sanctification. In *Totality and Infinity* it was the case that messianism appeared as the best method of articulating the sanctification of the human and of negotiating the problems associated with the fetish character of the human ordering this dynamic. Messianism was there implicated in the short-circuiting of the hermeneutical detour of society, the eschatological catching up with the receding principal of interiority. This was articulated through the messianic paradigm of the master-disciple anthropology. In radicalising the sanctification of the human, Levinas

appeals rather to the anthropology of the ‘suffering servant’. We should note, however, that there is nothing necessarily messianic about this paradigm. Heskett notes that most modern attempts to solve the identity of the servant have tended towards non-messianic interpretations.<sup>375</sup> This is also true traditionally for Judaism: where, Heskett also notes, the verses on the Servant in Isaiah were interpreted messianically within the Jewish textual tradition, the element of suffering was elided from the paradigm. Heskett himself argues for the *possibility*, and not the necessity, of the messianic interpretation of the suffering servant, insofar as redactors of the non-messianic, pre-exilic traditions from which this paradigm arose introduced into them an element of ‘functional ambiguity’ in which the identity of the servant figure was rendered deliberately indeterminable. This ambiguity ‘allows this passage to be heard as messianic’ insofar as it appears to open itself ‘prophetically’ to future resolution of its indeterminable character. It allows messianic interpretation just as much as it allows non-messianic interpretation, however, and there have been a host of possible interpretations of the figure from being an already existent scriptural figure to a symbol for Israel itself or the remnant of Israel. Other interpretations have emphasized its proximity to diverse near eastern mythical figures such as the Ugaritic Baal and Canaanite Tammuz, as well as linking the figure to the near eastern cultic archetype of the dying and rising god.<sup>376</sup>

For our own part, we noted that the fact that the principle horizon of *Otherwise than Being* is the radical past renders problematic the messianic character of Levinas’ rendition of the suffering servant. Agamben could of course be correct and we would stand convicted of the fallacy of the fixation on the dimension of the future as indispensable for any messianism. There is, however, a more straightforward interpretation of Levinas’ focus on the radical past. The intensification of the dynamic of sanctification determines that in *Otherwise than Being* a vehicle other than of the eschatological serves as its best means of expression. Given the greater separation between ‘human’ and ‘humanity’ produced by the intensification of the dynamic of sanctification the ‘conversation’ between these two principles which hitherto defined messianism is no longer possible. Another means of articulating a relation across this separation is necessary, one orientated towards the radical past.

We noted the consensus that in *Otherwise than Being*, the relation with the other drops out of sight in face of the greater concentration on the ‘messianic consciousness’ of the self. For the most part this is true. However there are some notably exceptions to this tendency, such as the following.

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<sup>375</sup> Heskett, R *Messianism within the Scriptural Scroll of Isaiah* (T & T Clark International, London, 2007) p133

<sup>376</sup> Ibid p140/1

A trace lost in a trace, less than nothing in the trace of the excessive, but always ambiguously (trace of itself, possibly a mask, in a void, possibly nothingness or the “pure form of the sensibility”) the face of the neighbour obsesses me with this destitution. “He is looking at me” – everything in him looks at me; nothing is indifferent to me. Nothing is more imperative than this abandon in the emptiness of space, this trace of infinity which passes without being able to enter. In it is hollowed out the face as a trace of an absence, as a skin with wrinkles. (OBBE93)

The face retains here rather an essential function: important here, it is true, is not so much the face itself but what it does to the *background* against or horizon in which it appears. Conventionally we do not relate to others ‘against the emptiness of space’, but within the horizons of interests, obligations, means/ends, conventions, prejudices etc. However, via the gaze of the face, the pure expression of the alien cutting through this horizon in which it appears, the face ‘hollows out’ this horizon. The other is alienated from the self, is essentially alienation: the other is by definition that which cannot appear within the same sphere, the sphere which belongs to the self, and thus represents the *leakage* of this sphere. The other represents a ‘hole in being’ through which all social substance leaks out. The other is sheer ‘destitution’: it creates of Being a vacuum. The other thus appears to the self against the background of a vacuum drained of all substance, signification, sociality.

*Nonetheless*, and this is the crucial turning point, the other still embodies a certain sociality, a certain *appeal*, despite the absence of any common substance through which to call. This is ‘thanks to’ the infinite. As such, the background becomes the ‘abandonment in the emptiness of space, this trace of infinity.’ The ‘emptiness of space’ becomes the ‘trace of infinity’: it wavers between emptiness and infinity because within this emptiness there is a zero point of content, that of the ‘imperative’ which still resonates in this context emptied of all substance. In the pure vacuum the other is nonetheless still in uncomfortable proximity, there is still a call from other to self. The infinite in this vacuum still imposes the other on the self, and obligates the self to the other. After the face of the other hollows out this sphere, the infinite *re-establishes* the conditions for a shared sphere, the condition for society. The infinite takes us back to where we were to begin with: it is “with the help of God”, that ‘a terrain common to me and the others’ is created. (OB162) What logic is in operation here?

This logic is *ritual*. The face in *Otherwise than Being* plays a ritual role, namely the role of *purification*: the other purifies the site in which the relation between self and other is to take place. It purifies it of all content, of all institutional mediation and social substance. The relation between self and other is to begin from the absolute absence of relation: there is to be



no 'prior dialogue' which 'sustains' their relation. (OB118) Nothing is to prepare the way for their relation, no pre-existent complicity or fraternity: 'a voice' is to come 'from the other shore'. (OB183) The miraculous character of the relation with the other arises from the fact that this relation establishes community against the background of the absolute lack of community. The face of the other 'signifies prior to any world.' (OB137) How can self and other speak a language to each other when there is as yet no language or signification? How can language arise spontaneously? The miraculous character of the relation with the other is in the fact that a signification crosses from the other to the self, animal recoil is transfigured into response, *before* self and other share a language, or before a common, inter-subjective and hence objective world has come into existence, or *after* the face of the other has purified the site of all such pre-existing language so it can signify as the ritual re-enactment of this *before*.

It is the orientation towards purification in view of ritual re-enactment in which the dynamic of sanctification culminates in *Otherwise than Being*. *Otherwise than Being*, we observed, is structured according to a series of primordial border crossings which are re-enacted in each social act: sensibility to intelligibility, breath to speech, trauma to inspiration. To this we could add a series of other border crossings:

Being's essence is a dissipating of opacity, not only because this "drawing out" of being would have to have been first understood so that truth could be told about things, events and acts that are; but because this drawing out is the original dissipation of opaqueness. In it forms are illuminated where knowledge is awakened; in it being leaves the night, or, at least, quits sleep, that night of night for an inextinguishable insomnia of consciousness. (OB30)

The first intentionality of sensibility, of the sensible flux *as* the 'Here and Now', is not simply a preliminary to the intelligible comprehension of objects, Levinas tell us, but is itself a form of intelligibility. It constitutes already a dissipating of the opaqueness of the hyletic flow, is the original opening or 'clearing' of Being. In this original dissipating or clearing are a series of crossings: the crossing of the border from opacity into clarity, from darkness into light, from night into day, from 'sleep' into the 'wakefulness' or the 'insomnia' of consciousness.

All of these border crossings to be ritually re-enacted culminate in one principal border crossing, that of the 'non-site, becoming a site' (OB184) *Space* represents an original exposure and vulnerability to pure worldlessness and is one, we noted, with the raw asubjective *time* of lapse: it is the 'outside where nothing covers anything, non-protection, the reverse of a retreat, homelessness, non-world, non-habitation, layout without security.'

(OB179) This radical insecurity is in turn articulated as a primordial absence of anything approaching a public sphere or original commonality thanks to which the majority of the effort in relating to other individuals in society has already been made before any particular relation takes place. Rather than the neutralising or rendering anodyne of everyday relations which such notions imply, for Levinas all individuals must contend ever anew with the 'openness of space' in their relations with each other. The 'universal homogeneity' of place, or society as a mediating substance between individuals, is contrasted with the 'anarchic' space across which individuals relate in immediate and traumatic 'proximity'.(OB82) *Otherwise than Being* is orientated to a large extent towards showing that such a homogeneity cannot and must not be taken for granted. Place must be dissolved, or alternatively reduced back to the anarchy of 'space' from where it is possible to observe the manner in which place is never static but continuously emerges and disappears back into space. The face is alienation, does not exist in the same horizon, and thus in every social act can be re-enacted the construction of a common horizon.

The face of the other in *Otherwise than Being* becomes the site a ritual clearing or purification so that a series of primordial border crossings can be re-enacted upon it. The birth of humanism, of civilization indeed, is *summarized* into a single event which can then be ritually re-enacted in each subsequent social action. At work is a resuming of a process of production, that of the human, into a single event which can be ritually re-embodied: beside and supplementing its ritual logic, in other words, *Otherwise than Being* follows a distinctly *mythical* logic.

Rather than messianic, the fundamental orientation of *Otherwise than Being* would appear to be in a different direction. The dynamic between memory and expectation central to messianism in the Jewish tradition cannot of course be ignored. Mattern writes of the Jewish focus on creation in face of the Christian and Gnostic focus on redemption.<sup>377</sup> The dynamic between apocalypticism and restoration of a lost order or justice in Scholem's messianic 'idea', or as Bergo puts it a 'curvature in historical temporality, bending the future back toward a time irretrievably lost', is pertinent.<sup>378</sup> The Jewish economy between memory and expectation does not, however, appear to have anything to do with the radical memory evoked here, a memory unsuited for integration into such economy. In this orientation towards the staging of the ritual re-enactment of the first act in each social situation a more appropriate definition of

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<sup>377</sup> Mattern, J 'Memoire et messianisme: sur l'idée messianique chez Gershom Scholem, Jacob Taubes et Emmanuel Levinas', *Cahiers d'Etudes Lévinassiennes* 4 (2005) pp201-232 (p229)

<sup>378</sup> 'Levinas's Weak Messianism in Time and Flesh, or The Insistence of Messiah Ben David' *Journal for Cultural Research* Vol13 No3/4 (2009) pp225-248 (p234)

the fundamental orientation of *Otherwise than Being* would rather be that of *reminiscence*. This would be controversial insofar as the face as the site of the reminiscence of a 'first act' is more native to the 'Greek' rather than 'Hebrew' tradition. The example of reminiscence given in the *Phaedrus* would seem to be most pertinent here. 'Nature requires that the soul of every human being has seen reality; otherwise, no soul could have entered this sort of living thing' we are told by Socrates.<sup>379</sup> Without direct *exposure* to the truth at the point of its birth, the human soul would not be human, would not be capable of *speech* insofar as the latter requires perception of general forms which only exposure to the truth grants. This original 'blessed and spectacular vision', one of the original companionship with the gods, determines the character of the soul throughout its cycle: 'everyone spends his life honouring the god in whose chorus he danced, and emulates that god in every way he can.'<sup>380</sup> The trajectory of the *Phaedrus* is thus determined by memory and recollection in the radical sense. Its discussion of love and sexual desire takes place in view of the exemplary things within the world, objects of beauty, which allow for the reminiscence of the original radiance of this exposure, in which seeing the 'beauty we have down here' one is 'reminded of true beauty'.<sup>381</sup> Above all, that which enables and inspires this reminiscence is that of the vision of beauty in the *face*, in particular in the face of the beautiful boy on the discussion of which the *Phaedrus* is centred: 'they are struck by the boy's face as if by a bolt of lightning. When the charioteer sees that face his memory is carried back to the real nature of Beauty.'<sup>382</sup> 'They are startled when they see an image of what they saw up there.'<sup>383</sup> The charioteer of the soul, encumbered by the unruly horses which drag it down to the squalidness of material and ephemeral being, is suddenly given a spurt of flight back to its *origin* which is also its *goal*.

The encounter with the face is an encounter with a beauty characterised by a radical transparency, a beauty which is radically *diaphanous*, through which radiates a forgotten origin, the moment of soul's proximity to the divine. Needless to say there are diverse elements of Plato's account of the face as site of a reminiscence of the origin of the soul in proximity to the divine which are not compatible with Levinas' account. The phenomenology of the face in Levinas is a question neither of beauty nor a search for knowledge by means of the latter. The face in Levinas is not even a question of vision and it is certainly not a question of the vision of any onto-theological notion of 'true being' set against the being of materiality

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<sup>379</sup> Plato *Phaedrus* transl. by Nehemas, A Woodruff, P (Indiana, Hackett Publishing Company, 1995) p38

<sup>380</sup> Ibid p 42

<sup>381</sup> Ibid p37

<sup>382</sup> Ibid p44

<sup>383</sup> Ibid p38

and ephemerality. Levinas' well rehearsed playing off against each other of the figures of Ulysses and Abraham establishes from the outset Levinas' opposition to the notion of the face as the site of a return to the origin or nostalgia for a lost unity, and Levinas' opposition to any form of maieutics must also be taken into account. Most significantly, the relation with the face is most certainly not a question in Levinas of the means through which to escape time or enchainment to the body: Levinas' account of the face is a question of exposure to ageing and time in its purest or indeed rawest form, an exposure tied to the 'hyper-concrete' realm of the body conceived phenomenologically as the transcendental underside of consciousness, an exposure of which the face of the other is the reminiscence. Levinas indeed contrasts the 'reminiscence' involved in the cycle of Being, in which Being conceals the temporality of its manifestation, with the pure exposure to time as the index of the relation with the other. (OB26) As such, however, Levinas offers something of the inversion of the Platonic paradigm of reminiscence: proximity to the divine in the realm of the disembodied trans-temporal is transformed into the reminiscence of proximity to the divine within the context of the primordial exposure to time in its purest or rawest form set against neutralising historical and biographical time. As such Levinas' account strangely parallels that of Plato.

We can take confidence in Sloterdijk's revaluation and reconfiguring of the Platonic cult of the face in which many of the obstacles to the rapprochement of Levinas to Plato are overcome. For Sloterdijk the face is the site of reminiscence, or of a profound archaeological excavation, in which the entire process of 'anthropogenesis' can be summarized as if mythically in a single event. Sloterdijk appeals to a certain primitive economy of which the face is the product and which can still be glimpsed through the latter, namely the 'bio-cultural' genesis of the face, or 'this extraction of human faces on the basis of animal faces, of which the motivation is as much biological as cultural.'<sup>384</sup> The face becomes the threshold between biological and cultural, or as Sloterdijk explains it, the process of 'facialisation' is the process of 'protraction which lifts the faces in a facio-genetic process, to the point where they attain the capacity to become portraits.'<sup>385</sup> The energy for this *border crossing* in which the biological becomes cultural is *social*: 'its foundation, expressed in anthropological terms, is a luxurious evolution within a group fold (*serre de groupe*) which creates an insular space; its agent, its media, alongside other elements, is in the first place the interfacial space or interfacial sphere.'<sup>386</sup> It is the tightness or fold of a social sphere, that namely of the 'primal

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<sup>384</sup> Sloterdijk, P *Bulles: Sphères 1* (Paris, Fayard, 1998) p180

<sup>385</sup> Ibid

<sup>386</sup> Ibid

horde' Sloterdijk recounts, in which the radiance of faces, one mirroring the other and all each other in a closed circuit, raised over the process of a long evolution the face to the status of a text off which a set of meanings can be read: 'human faces . . . in some sense raise each other from the animal silhouette, by a simple reciprocal contemplation.'<sup>387</sup> The faces are the bio-cultural 'sculptures of attention'; they are sculpted from animal muzzles, which they in some sense always remain, into portraits by the attention which each bears for the other, a process in which thus 'human faces in a certain sense create each other'.<sup>388</sup> The face becomes the site of the reminiscence not of the birth of the disembodied soul in the realm of true being, but of the biological-cultural crossing into the human and of the social proximity, the field of interfacial warmth' or the 'affective temperatures which reigned in the spheres of the prehistoric hordes', which occasioned such a crossing.<sup>389</sup>

Sloterdijk's account of the reminiscence occasioned by the face, however, does not on its own allow for a full understanding of that of Levinas. Levinas unlike Sloterdijk retains the cultic aspect of Plato's account, the proximity of the soul to the divine, despite the fact that the categories which underpinned this account, the material versus the spiritual, have been subverted. In addition, Levinas' emphasis on the relation with the stranger, and on the aspect of the radical separation between self and other as the primary index of fraternity remain unintelligible in light of Sloterdijk's reminiscence of the closed circuit of faciality.

It is in fact Durkheim who allows us to integrate most fully these aspects into Levinas' account of the face as site of reminiscence. In the *Division of Labour in Society* Durkheim outlines what are presented as two distinct forms of solidarity, one which gives way to the other. We are namely concerned with his famous distinction between mechanical and organic solidarity. The former designates a solidarity in which the principal relation is not that of individuals to each other but of each individual to society considered somewhat positivistically as a self-coherent whole: it is 'solidarity *sui generis*' Durkheim tells us, one which 'directly links the individual with society.'<sup>390</sup> In effect life takes place in mechanical solidarity on two different levels: 'there are in us two consciences; one contains states which are personal to each of us and which characterize us, while the states which comprehend the other are common to all society.'<sup>391</sup> This latter consciousness or 'collective personality', confirmed directly within the consciousness of each individual principally by means of ritual,

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid

<sup>388</sup> Ibid p181

<sup>389</sup> Ibid p185

<sup>390</sup> Durkheim, E *The Division of Labour in Society* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1984) p106

<sup>391</sup> Ibid p105

is the consciousness of society through the medium of individuals: 'there are in each of us . . . two consciences: one which is common to our group in its entirety, which, consequently, is not ourself, but society living and acting within us.'<sup>392</sup> Social uniformity confirmed by means of ritual, simultaneously subjectively within each individual and objectively in the unity of all individuals, becomes the basis upon which individuals subsequently relate to each within the social segment. Such a concept of solidarity rests on the uniformity of the social segment and the homogeneity of all members within it: the minimum of ethnic, religious, and occupational difference. Here we have a closed circuit of sociality, although with the focus less on the reciprocal interfacial intentionality than on the attention of all individuals simultaneously to the same social whole. Social uniformity finds expression in collective 'sentiments' and 'beliefs', and results in a harsh punitive system: not as a means of enforcing and safeguarding uniformity but rather as an expression of this uniformity, where each crime is not regarded as a crime against another or other individuals but against the social whole itself. On the contrary, a further character of mechanical solidarity is that, although within the social segment – horde, clan etc - each individual life is in a majority of its aspects governed, outside of this social segment, specifically in the relation to unknown or unrelated social segments, there is a decisive absence of morality. Mechanical solidarity, whilst governing uniformity and conformity within the social segment has, as its necessary counterpart 'moral vacuums', an ethical no man's land, between social segments.<sup>393</sup>

The weakening of mechanical solidarity in its classical form, driven argues Durkheim by the progression of the division of labour, results in what ostensibly appears as a new form of solidarity which Durkheim names 'organic solidarity.' If mechanical solidarity represents social cohesion via a simultaneous relation of all individuals directly towards the social whole itself, and thereafter to each other, organic solidarity represents the reverse: 'The first binds the individual directly to society without any intermediary. In the second, he depends upon society, because he depends upon the parts of which it is composed.'<sup>394</sup> Mechanical solidarity becomes 'enfeebled' in the measure in which the social whole becomes indirect, merely the overall sum of interdependent relations between individuals within a civil society fragmented by the division of labour. The social whole progressively recedes from the horizon of individual experience with the greater complexity of the division of labour and the narrower allotment of each individual within it. With greater specialisation and differentiation,

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<sup>392</sup> Ibid p129

<sup>393</sup> Ibid p201

<sup>394</sup> Ibid p129

moreover, the social homogeneity as the basis upon which the social whole could take on an existence in itself is undermined. The deeply shared nature of sentiments and beliefs is likewise undermined with the splintering of functions, and the psychic life of the individual no longer receives its energy, direction and purpose exclusively from the collective sentiments and beliefs or the drama of the social whole which gave it form.<sup>395</sup>

It is in this transition that an ambiguity opens: from where exactly comes the cohesion which defines organic solidarity as solidarity after the passing of orientation towards the social whole which ensured its predecessor? Durkheim appears uncertain. At times he argues that an entirely new form of cohesion arises: 'negative solidarity', the limitation on one's freedom which the rights of others presuppose, 'is only an emanation from some other solidarity whose nature is positive.'<sup>396</sup> Such 'positive' solidarity results from the fact that increasing difference, whilst fragmenting homogeneity, also leads to increasing dependence of individuals on each other, insofar as it proliferates the different ways in which individuals are dependent on each other. Cohesion, solidarity, rather than being a simultaneous dependence of all individuals upon the social whole, becomes a mutual interdependence of all individuals upon each other. Durkheim is hesitant however: the interdependence of individuals in would not on its own be enough to ensure solidarity in society; it could indeed lead to the opposite of solidarity: 'the division of labour cannot be carried out save between the members of a society already constituted. Indeed when competition opposes isolated individuals not known to each other, it can only separate them still more.'<sup>397</sup> The solidarity which is expressed in the interdependence of individuals does not negate the fact that their participation in the division of labour is ultimately competitive. Durkheim outlines the 'anomy' and lack of cohesiveness which results from the centrifugal tendencies of the division of labour. Rather than greater solidarity, and density, he alternatively presents increasing specialism as leading to disintegration and social entropy.<sup>398</sup>

In what sense then does organic solidarity represent a form of solidarity? It appears that the element of 'solidarity' constitutive of 'organic solidarity' is not in fact any new solidarity but the lingering existence of the mechanical solidarity, which was to have been supplanted. The act of cooperation across exchange has for Durkheim an 'intrinsic morality': a morality underlying motives of self-interest and competition.<sup>399</sup> We are faced with the enigma as to

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<sup>395</sup>Ibid p 233

<sup>396</sup> Ibid p122

<sup>397</sup> Ibid p275-7

<sup>398</sup> Ibid p351

<sup>399</sup> Ibid p228

how a morality can underlie self-interest. It lies, as Talcott-Parsons argues, only in the 'habit' constituted by mechanical solidarity.<sup>400</sup> The division of labour, writes Durkheim himself, can be produced 'only in the midst of a pre-existing society.'<sup>401</sup> The intrinsic morality behind functional relations of organic solidarity is nothing other than the continuing influence of mechanical solidarity; organic solidarity depends upon the lingering, enigmatic influence of its predecessor, of the *trace* of a social principal which has apparently withdrawn. The progression of the division of labour, Durkheim argues, can only take place against the background of a pre-existing solidarity. 'The division of labour unites at the same time that it opposes . . . since competition cannot have determined this conciliation it must have existed before.'<sup>402</sup> Mechanical solidarity does not disappear, but rather takes on a transformed and increasingly elusive form. Durkheim gives some indications of this elusive presence: 'as unified, simple and impersonal as the moral idea was, it grows more and more so whilst diversifying itself.'<sup>403</sup> The progression of the division of labour does not straightforwardly weaken mechanical solidarity; it rather renders it as more abstract, general, refined. Mechanical solidarity becomes the increasingly abstract and general *awareness* which accompanies, however, each assuming of a function within the division of labour, a function which the individual feels precisely the moral obligation to assume. The consciousness of mechanical solidarity becomes more abstract, general and refined as the division of labour becomes more specified and particularised. On the one hand, the force of the 'personal' level of the consciousness of the individual exists in inverse proportion to the 'social' level of his consciousness.<sup>404</sup> On the other hand, the 'psychic life' of the individual somewhat interiorizes or inherits the 'psychic life' of the social whole: 'this growth of psychic life in the individual does not obliterate the psychic life of society, but only transforms it.'<sup>405</sup> This psychic life becomes the generalised potential for assuming any given position within the division of labour taken as a whole, fragments into dotted isles of social substance across which a diversity of crossings take place.

Organic solidarity depends upon the survival of mechanical solidarity, upon the *reminiscence* of the latter in the former. Levinas, in his consideration of the how the ritual values of the Talmud might be rendered intelligible as ethical principles for the modern man,

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<sup>400</sup> Talcott, P *The structure of social action : a study in social theory with special reference to a group of recent European writers* (London, Allen & Unwin Glencoe, Free Press, 1949) p321-3

<sup>401</sup> Durkheim, Division of Labour p277

<sup>402</sup> Ibid p276

<sup>403</sup> Ibid p 43

<sup>404</sup> Ibid p173

<sup>405</sup> Ibid p347/8



states his adherence to the imperative to never vulgarise that which is elevated, always to exalt it, always to draw from an ageing value its sublimation.' (BV36) To what extent does Levinas work attest to the sublimation of the prime value in process of ageing, that of mechanical solidarity? To what extent is the face of the other the site of the *reminiscence* of mechanical solidarity through the interpersonal relations of organic solidarity?

It is worth here considering once more the theme of the transcendental underside of consciousness in *Otherwise than Being*, this 'abandonment in the emptiness of space' which the relation with the face ritually re-enacts. This transcendental underside is to represent both the site of pure exposure of consciousness to exteriority, we noted, and the primordial site of fraternity with the other: 'the opening of space as opening of self without world, without place . . . is the proximity of the other person.' (OBB182) On the one hand, this primordial, hyper-concrete space takes on a distinctly theological resonance. It represents the condition of being

uprooted from the world, from horizons, from conditions, inserted in the signification without context, of the one-for-the-other coming from the emptiness of space, space deserted and desolate, inhabitable like homogenous geometrical space. Abandoned, but by whom or what? Empty from abandonment or – equivocation to the point of demystification ! - simply vastness . . . (OBBE91)

The echo of Nietzsche here is audible: 'who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? . . . Are we not straying as through an empty nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space?'<sup>406</sup> The 'Death of God', which in Levinas is registered as the haunting absence of *Illeity*, is given positive significance by Levinas insofar as it is presented as the enigmatic structure which brings about the fraternity of self and other. On the other hand, Levinas' presentation of this primordial space then takes a decisive turn towards social commentary. Levinas continues:

Milieu indifferent to the comings and goings of men . . . Empty space of that which could not be recollected . . . possibly nothing, but of which the surplus over pure nothingness is my non-indifference with regards to my neighbour. (OBBE116)

Here Levinas introduces into phenomenology certain social anxieties belonging to a certain stage of civilization. In this 'abandonment' to 'empty space' as the abandonment to the 'milieu indifferent to the comings and goings of men', that is, can clearly be discerned a definite anxiety which has elsewhere been articulated with greater clarity: 'if the substantial

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<sup>406</sup>Nietzsche, F *The Gay Science: with a prelude in German rhymes and an appendix of songs* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001) section 108

communities once hid or muffled our relationship with the world, then their dissolution now clarifies this relation for us: the loss of one's job, or the change which alters the features of the functions of labour, or the loneliness of metropolitan life – all these aspects of our relationship with the world assume many of the traits which formerly belonged to the kind of terror one feels outside the walls of the community.<sup>407</sup> Levinas' 'abandonment' in and 'exposure' to the 'emptiness of space' follows the same logic as this disintegration of the 'substantial communities' which as such no longer form a barrier to our 'being exposed to the world'<sup>408</sup>. In other words, in this milieu 'indifferent to the comings and goings of men', resulting from the breakdown of 'substantial' communities, we have Durkheim's breakdown of the social segment which marks the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity.

What is to be noted here is how paradoxical Levinas' formulation is: space represents 'the milieu *indifferent* to the comings and goings of men'; and yet equally space represents 'my *non-indifference* with regards to the neighbour'. (OBBE116) The disintegration into space should result in socially centrifugal tendencies, especially given that the outcome of this disintegration is such an 'indifferent' milieu. However, Levinas writes, the disintegration into space 'tightens the other up close against me'. (OBBE182) We are presented in other words with the paradox of the disintegration of social substance in this 'indifferent milieu' which in its very disintegration guarantees and indeed orders relations: 'the tightening the other against me'. Of course it is this 'tightening up against' which is precisely a product of the progression of the division of labour, which 'tightens' individuals up against each other in relations of functional interdependence.

We observed that, on the one hand, for Durkheim mechanical solidarity seems to disappear, whilst on the other, it rather becomes to an even greater extent impersonal, unitary and abstract. How does Levinas' notion of space stand next to such a definition of transformed mechanical solidarity? Levinas gives of the 'abandonment in the emptiness of space' another description:

Gaping openness of an abyss in proximity, the infinity which flashes on and off (qui clignote) . . . distinguishes itself from the nothing pure and simple by the commission of the neighbour to my responsibility (AE116, OBBE93)<sup>409</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Virno, P *A grammar of the multitude: for an analysis of contemporary forms of life* (New York, Semiotexte, 2004) p33

<sup>408</sup> Ibid p32

<sup>409</sup> Lingis' translation is substantially different from my own.

Here we have presented in most direct form the zero point element of substantiality, or of mechanical solidarity, a substantiality or solidarity which '*flashes on and off*' in the face to face relation with an interlocutor. The '*commission*' of the self to the other by space is the 'infinitesimal difference' between space and pure nothingness. It is the *office* of the self to accept the charge of the other abandoned in space. Can we see in this 'commissioning' a transformation into the functional language of organic solidarity, and modelled to the dynamic of the interpersonal relation according to which the latter is ordered, the *command* of mechanical solidarity? Levinas speaks of a command coming from empty space, from 'I know not where': as 'an imperative force which is not a necessity'. (OBBE93) The imperative force of mechanical solidarity is weakened since transgression is no longer accompanied by the vengeance of all punishments dealt out for crimes against the social whole. Yet equally, 'nothing is more imperative than this abandoning in the emptiness of space.' (OBBE93) The command is alternatively not weakened but transformed: with the evisceration of social substantiality, the becoming 'impersonal, unitary and abstract' in face of the progression of organic solidarity, the social whole no longer commands the individual to *itself* but as the zero point of substantiality commands to the *other*.

We have already observed how the 'humanism' of *Otherwise than Being* is determined by the relation between the self and the other ordered by the indirect passing of the infinite in the form of '*Illeity*'. *Illeity* commands the 'detour' from it to the other. This, we observed, signified a humanism in which all others in society embody an imperative insofar as they appear as the fossils of a social principle which has already withdrawn. Is this 'voice from nowhere', or the 'enigmatic structure' which *Illeity* represents, the survival or reminiscence of mechanical solidarity? The other as interlocutor in *Otherwise than Being* withdraws from the status as interlocutor becoming not only a 'trace' but a trace of a trace: a 'trace lost in trace'. The first trace of the face shades into the second trace of *Illeity*. The face is the event horizon, that is, which traces the trajectory via which the other as interlocutor, as 'You' shades into *Illeity* or '*He-ness*'. In this shading of the second person interlocutor into the third person 'He-ness' can we discern the shading of the 'organic' relation, that between interdependent individuals, into what was formally the 'mechanical' relation to the social whole? The 'neighbour' is 'the first one to come along', whoever the division of labour happens to present us with in functional interrelation, whilst the generic 'Here I am' as the underlying all language moves could easily be envisaged as individuality reporting for duty whatever particular duty might be required of it within the division of labour. For Durkheim, after all, individualization is presented as a social duty, as the duty to interiorize the potentialities

which the division of labour both offers and requires.<sup>410</sup> The taking on and fulfilling of a function in relation to whatever individual randomly presents himself in need of such a function takes on the *ritual* aspect of the continual confirmation and renewal of mechanical solidarity. Levinas' work could then be seen as a continual attestation of the survival or reminiscence of this *ritual* element in *functional* interaction.

This analogy can remain here only a suggestion; we have done enough, we believe, to render it plausible. Its significance in this context is that it strongly suggests a source other than messianic for Levinas' 'suffering servant' paradigm. Rather than anchored to any messianic orientation, *Otherwise than Being* would be tied to an articulation of the reminiscence of certain survivals structural to society. The construal of this as messianic is understandable, although we believe ultimately misguided, insofar as Levinas' text reveals in some sense the dynamic character of such survival. Levinas' retaining of the cultic aspect of the reminiscence which the face embodies, along with its connection to the stranger, as the site of fraternity becomes comprehensible in light of this dynamism, or the transformed character which mechanical solidarity takes on as a survival. In effect with the hollowing out of mechanical solidarity, in this 'abandonment in the emptiness of space', all individuals become *strangers* to each other in the same measure that they are *compelled* to each other. The area around 'substantial communities' as the locus of mechanical solidarity, as Durkheim points articulating a classical position, is characterised by 'moral vacuums', ethical gaps. The division of labour effectuates a crossing of these moral vacuums in the same measure that it undermines what was formerly the locus of morality. As a result, the distinction between the mechanical solidarity and the 'moral gap' which existed beyond its frontiers is problematised, along with the distinction between the face of the 'human' face within Sloterdijk's closed interfacial circuit and the 'inhuman' face of the stranger. Each social experience within the division of labour becomes the liminal experience of the reminiscence of mechanical solidarity across the 'moral vacuums' which separate one stranger from the next within the division of labour. In this morally impelled crossing of the 'moral vacuum' is rendered intelligible the invoking of the transhuman against the background of the nonhuman as a ritual re-enactment of a series of primordial border crossings; or the reminiscence of a survival, one transformed in the process of its reminiscence.

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<sup>410</sup>Durkheim, Division of Labour p347/8

Messianism and Parody b) Messianism and Politeness

This theory receives its most convincing proof in the manner in which the paradigm of the suffering servant is articulated by Levinas in *Otherwise than Being*. The self at its most primordial layer is constituted by a 'messianic consciousness' articulated via the language of 'exposure', 'persecution', 'substitution', 'expatriation', 'substitution' etc. of the self for the other. The self is burdened with an infinite obligation, one which increases with each attempt to fulfil it. From this, thinkers like Kavka and Bergo among others interpret, arises the messianic task of the self. The self is alone charged with the task of bringing about the messianic age, capable of relying on no-one or thing, no historical teleology etc, but itself. Yet what in fact constitutes this 'messianic task' in *Otherwise than Being*?

The articulation of a certain humanism around the messianic paradigm of the suffering servant, we noted, finds its earliest and most complete expression in Cohen's *Religion of Reason out of the Sources of Judaism*. Much of what later constitutes the backbone of Levinas' ethics, as well as other forms of dialogical ethics, is already articulated here in more accessible form. Cohen articulates namely a notion of religion whose horizon opens via the relation with other human beings. Like Levinas, Cohen begins with the 'religious' concept of man separated from and supplementing the 'ethical' concept, a relation in which man must abstract from his individuality and 'complete his higher metabolism in the organism of the state'.<sup>411</sup> The religious relation is in contrast to this mapped onto an 'I-Thou' relation in which the irreducible individuality of both parties, rather than their collective belonging to the state, is highlighted. This individualisation of an I before a 'Thou', and the opening of the religious horizon which accompanies it, takes place insofar as this 'Thou' is par excellence a *suffering* 'Thou'. The individual is individualised in his compassion for the suffering of the 'Thou' and his responsibility for alleviating this suffering. At the same time, in this compassion and responsibility the religious horizon opens insofar as 'a dazzling light suddenly makes me see the dark spots in the sun of life.'<sup>412</sup> The individual, in other words, puts in question his empirical existence, and thus is obliged 'take interest in the question of whether the ideal has life and actuality'.<sup>413</sup> Any previous complacency in the empirical is replaced by a thirst for the ideal. The compassion and responsibility of the 'I' for the 'Thou' as such leads necessarily both to monotheism and to messianism: it leads namely to a vision of God as the one who

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<sup>411</sup> Cohen, *Religion of Reason* p16/17

<sup>412</sup> *Ibid* p19

<sup>413</sup> *Ibid* p20/1

guarantees the possibility of the permeating of the actual by the ideal, or the possibility of the ‘perfection’, the end of evil and onset of peace, and a vision of messianism as the age in which and the agency by which this possibility will be realised:

‘It is understandable that monotheism reaches its summit in Messianism. Messianism, however, means the dominion of the good on earth. One daily encounters the opinion that the Messiah could come only when injustice ceases. However, this is exactly the meaning of the Messiah: that injustice will cease . . . Morality will be established in the human world.’<sup>414</sup>

Messianism becomes for Cohen the postulate that the distinction between the actual and the ideal according to which all morality functions is not eternal and unalterable. The Messiah is not so much a figure as the idealised principle of the possibility of this overcoming throughout history and as history.

It is from this idealisation of messianism into the possibility and goal of history that the ‘messianic task’ of the self proceeds as something of the infinite Kantian path towards moral perfection: ‘the inexorable goal of the approximation is the permeation of actuality with the ideal.’ Beyond any figure of the Messiah, messianism in Cohen also becomes the pure idea of the future towards which history is orientated: ‘The ideality of the Messiah, his significance as an idea, is shown in the overcoming of the person of the Messiah and in the dissolution of the personal image in the pure notion of time . . . Time becomes future and only future.’<sup>415</sup> Messianism becomes an expression of the fact that history by its nature embodies a prophetic drive: ‘Messianism must be considered as a creation of ideas brought about by the prophetic concept of history. The concept of history is a creation of the prophetic idea.’<sup>416</sup> The Messiah himself is at one moment made into a symbol for the people of Israel as a whole, or in particular for the just ‘remnant of Israel’ which is itself in turn a symbol, Cohen tells us in a further idealisation, for the just of humanity.<sup>417</sup> Ultimately the Messiah becomes the symbol of the ‘ideal man’ inscribed not within any soteriological horizon but within the horizon of the project of human self-sanctification: ‘Man should be able to become a saint in the sense that he should surpass human limitation, that he should be allowed actually to draw near to God.’ Messianism becomes the idealised terminus of this trajectory towards becoming a saint, an asymptotic terminus in ‘the problem of human action as an *infinite* task’ or of an ‘infinite

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<sup>414</sup> Ibid p21

<sup>415</sup> Ibid p249

<sup>416</sup> Ibid p261

<sup>417</sup> Ibid p267

striving and becoming'.<sup>418</sup> It is no private trajectory however, but the collective work of all individuals in history towards a unified mankind beyond all national differences, a task articulated in terms of a religious socialism in which inspiration is to be taken from the 'fight of the prophets against the Kings, the princes and the rich'.<sup>419</sup>

The 'messianic consciousness' of the self arising from the paradigm of the suffering servant, in its expression par excellence in Cohen, is inscribed within an infinite path of self-perfection. It constitutes a form of praxis. In what praxis does the 'messianic consciousness' of the suffering servant in Levinas culminate? In *Totality and Infinity* we examined in detail the passage from the other to the third person, in which Levinas justifies the passage to totality and betrayal of ethics by virtue of the need for comparison and rationality in face of the competing claims of different others. *Otherwise than Being* presents the passage from the other to the third in greater detail, fleshing out the more cursory treatment it receives directly in *Totality and Infinity*. As such, the scope of the passage from the other to the third in *Otherwise than Being* is widened: 'my relationship with the other as neighbour gives meaning to my relations with all the others. All human relations as human proceed from disinterestedness.' (OB159) 'Nothing is outside the control of the responsibility of the one for the other' Levinas continues. We have accordingly an expanded list of that which can be included under the passage from ethics to justice, other to the third:

The extraordinary commitment of the other to the third party calls for control, a search for justice, society and the State, comparison and possession, thought and science, commerce and philosophy, and outside of anarchy the search for a principle. (OB161)

In other words, any institution in society can be considered a result of the passage from the other to the third. The need to compare responsibilities between two others calls for 'weighing, thought, objectification' which brings into being not only the passage to law courts and politics but to 'thought and science'. The relation with the other is originally 'anarchical' Levinas tells us: it signifies originally outside all systems, institutions, abstracts, disrupting these from the course of their normal functioning as the pure case of exceptionality. We have observed, however, that the relation with the other is 'anarchical' in *Otherwise than Being* only insofar as it rehearses or re-enacts the conditions which bring the *arche* into existence. This passage in *Otherwise than Being* retains the same problematic character that we observed

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<sup>418</sup> Ibid p111

<sup>419</sup> Ibid p259

in *Totality and Infinity*, insofar as it results merely in the re-establishment of the same conditions which it is to critique. There is nothing of Cohen's "fight of the prophets against the Kings, the princes and the rich".<sup>420</sup>

Amongst the diverse expressions of the relation with the other within the realm of the relation with the third, there is one which indeed in Levinas' later work in general appears to take on a certain privilege. In *Otherwise than Being* it is presented at the conclusion, and as something of the culmination, of the work, in the context of the discussion of 'hypocrisy'. In the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas articulated the theme of 'hypocrisy': 'To tell the truth, ever since eschatology has opposed peace to war the evidence of war has been maintained in an essentially hypocritical civilization, that is, attached both to the True and to the Good.' (TI24) At the close of *Otherwise than Being*, Levinas takes up once more this theme, giving a variation on it:

'Here I am for the others – an enormous response, whose inordinateness is attenuated with the hypocrisy as soon as it enters my ears forewarned of being's essence, that is, the way being carries on. The hypocrisy is from the first denounced. But the norms to which the denunciation refers have been understood in the enormity of meaning and in the full resonance of their statement to be true like unrestrained witness.' (OB185)

Despite the appeal to the 'grace' in which the crushing responsibility of the relation with the other is transformed 'thanks to God' into the equal and institutionalised relation with the third, this transformation still represents a certain 'hypocrisy'. Yet this hypocrisy has undergone a subtle change since *Totality and Infinity*. In *Totality and Infinity* it was 'civilization', 'ontology', 'history', 'politics' etc, in other words the dimension of the third, in which hypocrisy was inscribed: hypocrisy represented the knowledge of and yet indifference towards the relation of 'eschatological peace' embedded within this relation with the third. Here in *Otherwise than Being*, however, it is evidently rather the relation with the other which is hypocritical: the betrayal of the relation with the other, is already announced in this very relation, is part of the very logic of this relation. Rather than serving to inspire the individual towards Cohen's messianic task of the self perfection and self-sanctification of the human, we have in Levinas inscribed within the relation with the other a spirit of resignation to hypocrisy and inevitable betrayal.

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<sup>420</sup> Ibid p259



Despite the deflation, the inevitable ‘hypocrisy’ of the third already inscribed in the relation with the other, Levinas tells us that the ‘enormity of meaning’ of the relation with the other surprisingly is not undermined. How is this possible? Levinas continues:

In any case nothing less was needed for the little humanity which adorns the earth, if only with simple politeness and the pure polish of manners. (OBBE185)

This is all but the final word of *Otherwise than Being*: the ‘enormity’ of the relation with the other is required as the condition of possibility without which such a thing as ‘politeness’ and ‘courtesy’ would be possible. This resonates with other statements in *Otherwise than Being* and in other places in Levinas’ later work. In *God, Death and Time*, for example: ‘the condition of a hostage is the condition without which one could never say a simple ‘After you, sir’ (GDT138). Bourretz underlines this aspect, noting that the spirit of Levinas’ later collection of essays on political theory, *Entre Nous*, this aspect of the relation with the other as condition of possibility of politeness summarizes the spirit of Levinas’ mature first philosophy.<sup>421</sup> Levinas himself articulates such a vision on several occasions in various interviews. We have in our study placed emphasis on the dimension of the ‘holiness’ or sanctification of the human. In the following excerpt from a later interview, Levinas renders courtesy as its most privileged expression:

‘The word ethics is Greek; More often, especially now, I think about the holiness of the face or the holiness of obligation as such. So be it! There is holiness in the face but above all there is holiness or the ethical in relation to oneself in a comportment which encounters the face as face, where the obligation with respect to the other is imposed before all obligation: to respect the other, to take the other into account, to let him pass before oneself. And courtesy! Yes, that is very good, to let the other pass before I do; this little effort of courtesy is also an access to the face. Why should you pass before me? That is very difficult, because you, too, encounter my face. But courtesy or ethics consists in not thinking that reciprocity.’<sup>422</sup>

The privileged expression of the passage from the relation with the other to the relation with the third is ‘politeness’ or ‘courtesy’. The privileged *realisation*, that is, of the relation with the other in the social realm is politeness or courtesy. We have nothing here of the ‘tragic efforts’ of the attempt through justice to realise ethics within its horizons whilst unavoidably betraying it, a common characterisation of justice. There is ultimately no tragic effort here. Ethics has already done its work, served its purpose: it has laid the basis across which

<sup>421</sup> Bourretz, *Temoins du Futur* p901

<sup>422</sup> Robbins, *Interviews* p49

politeness and cordial intercourse can take place within civil society. The most essential sense of Levinasian ethics in its mature form is that of the transcendental reduction of politeness, of courtesy. All of Levinas' tortuous formulations on the 'suffering servant', on the 'infinite responsibility', 'hostageship' 'expiation', 'maternity', 'obsession', 'substitution' of the self by the other and for the other ultimately in order to articulate the conditions of possibility of politeness? We are faced it seems with something akin to the great fish of Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea* which has been reduced to a mere skeleton by the time the fisherman who caught it has returned from deep sea to land.

Yet in another sense such a denouement fits perfectly with the central dynamic of *Otherwise than Being* as we have here traced it, with the ritual logic by which it is governed. The relation between self and other begins from absolute alienation or the utter absence of relation: there is no 'prior dialogue' which 'sustains' their relation. Alternatively, the site of their relation has been ritually *purified* by Levinas of all such 'prior dialogue' so that the relation between self and other can ritually re-enact the conditions which brought the site into existence, and so that it can become the site of the border crossing in which the divine *pneuma* resonates. Space, Levinas writes in *Proper Names*, is the 'uncrossable' abyss between self and other, an abyss which is nevertheless crossed and re-crossed with each social act. The 'abyss' between self and other becomes nonetheless the *zwischen*, the 'between', charged with the polarity of self and other. (PN24) The 'messianic' character of the relation with the other comes entirely from this crossing of the uncrossable, the crossing from one position in the division of labour to the other, a crossing of the 'moral gaps' between islets of social substance driven by the reminiscence of mechanical solidarity. The act of politeness is in a sense the most suitable medium through which to observe this crossing. The relation of politeness, in similar fashion to the face for Plato, represents the most *diaphanous* of social acts: it represents the zero point of pre-assumed relational content or social substance, the meeting of two strangers across a material medium and the principle of scarcity which this medium implies. As such it serves as the perfect surface through which in reminiscence the divine, or alternatively mechanical solidarity, can shine through. Politeness, that is, becomes a form of praxis with its own self-contained intelligibility and which does not look beyond itself: it is namely a form of *ritual* praxis.

All the hyperbolic language of 'obsession', 'traumatism', 'expiation', 'hostageship', 'substitution' etc is justified and is indeed required in order to articulate the 'miraculous' character of a relation which occurs without prior commonality, a meaning which is transmitted without a prior shared language. In other words, these terms do not actually

determine any specific mode of relating to the other: they are not the aspects of a particular species of relation which could be called ‘the relation with the other’, a particularly difficult and demanding relation set against other species of relation. They are the articulations simply of the fact that there is a relation at all with the other despite the absolute lack of any ‘prior support’. ‘It indeed remains absolute incomprehensible that the absolute outside-of-me, the other, would concern me’. (OB117) The language of ‘hostageship’, of the ‘suffering servant’ is as such the only way of rendering it comprehensible. We should note that despite all of the hyperbolae employed by Levinas to depict the relation with the other, or to depict the fact of there being any relation at all with the other, the fundamental and most rudimentary designation of the relation with the other by Levinas is *privative*: it is the ‘difference that is also the non-indifference of the same for the other’. (OB145) The substance of the relation with the other is ultimately that of privative ‘non-indifference’. The appeal to the ‘glory of the infinite’ is an expression of the effort involved in answering the question ‘am I my brother’s keeper?’ in the affirmative. (OB117) The relation with the other is defined most primordially as the absence of indifference; it is defined, that is, as the absence of the absence of relation. The hyperbolic notion of infinite responsibility is required to articulate this absence of indifference within the context of the ‘emptiness of space’ or of the ‘moral gap’ between self and other. The sense of *infinite* obligation is the only means of articulating the notion of an ‘approach’ within a social vacuum, the result of ritual purification, the likes of which presents quandaries for which all the *infinite* regresses of Zeno’s paradoxes are appropriate expressions: ‘the antecedent familiarity with being is not prior to the approach’, Levinas insists, *therefore* ‘the sense of the approach is goodness’. (OB137) Given the entirely privative sense upon which notions such as substitution etc are based, the fact that there is not an absence of relation, the fact that Levinas’ hyperbolic notion of ethics could be summarized as the transcendental reduction of politeness seems entirely appropriate:

Here we have the culmination of the parody of messianism in Levinas’ work, the deployment of the paradigm of the ‘suffering servant’ in order to articulate the conditions for or accomplish the transcendental reduction of politeness. In the dynamics of reminiscence within which this paradigm is likewise articulated, we can observe also the trajectory of the disappearance of messianism from Levinas’ intellectual universe. Beyond this radical reminiscence there is nothing more to be done beyond its ritual repetition. In the reminiscence of mechanical solidarity, the work of the suffering servant is completed. The ‘infinite obligation’, or the infinity involved in crossing the ‘moral gap’ from Achilles to tortoise from one position within the division of labour to the next, is within the act of politeness and

cordiality already accomplished. There is nothing left to be done, no task left to be accomplished, tragic, infinite, messianic or otherwise.

This is admittedly not quite the last word in *Otherwise than Being*. The obsessive relation of infinite obligation towards the other 'was needed for the little humanity which adorns the earth, if only with simple politeness and the pure polish of manners.' Upon this 'little humanity which adorns the earth' is followed a final gnomic utterance with which Levinas concludes *Otherwise than Being*. 'For the little humanity that adorns the earth, a relaxation of essence to the second degree is needed.' (OBBE185) What does this relaxation of essence to a second degree signify? The original relaxation of essence is that which is involved in the 'break up' of identity, in the anarchic exposure to the other at the level of internal time consciousness before self-identity has congealed and closed in upon itself. Subsequently, identity is re-established as necessary yet in a qualified sense: it no longer is capable of providing its own justification, but is rather justified only insofar as it leads to justice for the other in the realm of the third. Evidently, this relaxation of identity does not suffice. A subsequent relaxation of essence 'to the second degree' is required. Levinas gives no more indication of what this might represent other than that it is required in the 'the just war waged against war to tremble or shudder at every instant because of this very justice.' (OBBE185) At question here is the critique of a humanism based on the 'virile' attempts at establishing justice in society. These attempts lead ultimately to their opposite: Marxism's 'virile' project of disalienation lead to Stalinism and to the 'mobilization by absolutes' evoked in the preface to *Totality and Infinity*, a new and more potent form of alienation arising from the very project of disalienation. Thus against the 'virile' notion of a just war, there must be a new 'just war'. For this 'just war', we must go beyond the relaxation of essence which Levinas' work already charts. A 'just war against war' would require a further relaxation of identity. At no point in his work does Levinas give any indication of what this might involve.

Levinas does not and perhaps cannot develop this notion of a 'relaxation of essence to a second degree' because this concluding remark threatens to overturn the foundations of the very work which it concludes. The 'relaxation of essence to a second degree' would namely involve an even more radical undermining of the self-identical subjectivity closed upon itself than that already accomplished by Levinas. Yet the goal of both *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being* is precisely to show how this self-identity is produced and necessitated by responsibility, as the identity which can assume responsibility for the other and all others, the self-identity which can take the 'weight of the world' upon its shoulders. It is to be remembered that Levinas' principal aim as given is the qualified defence of a certain

‘anachronistic’ notion of subjectivity – that of the dimension of the interiority and the self-identity of the individual put under the structuralist scalpel. This identity is called into being in the ethical relation with the other and is demanded by it: the birth of identity in the saying ‘Here I am’ to the other is the very sign that this relation is ethical. In addition, much of Levinas’ work goes into showing that justice is not simply a betrayal of ethics, but is a necessary betrayal of ethics, a betrayal which ethics demands and which follows from ethics. Between the ethical necessity of justice and the exceeding of it in the ‘relaxation of essence to the second degree’ there is a hiatus. What would happen to the notion of responsibility once there is a further ‘relaxation of essence’: would a subject less sure of itself, less steady in the foundations of its identity, remain a ‘responsible’ subject? What would happen to the dimension of the ‘holiness’ of the human without the impenetrable walls of interiority to protect it from the profanities of the impersonal order of history and society?

There is a conflict between the two closing utterances of *Otherwise than Being*, one symptomatic of the conflict between the dynamics of sanctification and salvation in this work. There is a certain dualism at work in the two expressions given to ‘the little humanity which adorns the earth’: between the necessity of this ‘little humanity’ if for nothing more than the ‘simple politeness and the pure polish of mores’ and this same humanity required for the ‘relaxation of essence’ to a ‘second degree’. On the one hand, the former evidently articulates the *impasse* at which Levinas work finds itself: despite the hyperbolic character of the relation with the other, it can instantiate itself and render itself concrete in nothing more than politeness and courtesy. There is a certain resignation in the ‘in any case, nothing less was necessary’, a certain recognition of an *impasse* reached in that ethics can point to nothing more than the observance of the re-enacting of the conditions which brought society into existence, that it cannot realise itself as anything more than the transcendental reduction of politeness. On the other hand, in the transition from this ‘nothing less was necessary’ to the necessity of the ‘relaxation of essence to the second degree’ one could read the following: ‘after all our efforts, for the moment all we can affirm is - politeness. There is something else, however, on the horizon (precisely on the horizon of the future which has fallen out of sight): a relaxation of essence to the second degree. Yet we are not able to follow this possibility for it would disrupt the entire dynamic which we have here constructed, it would upset the ritual logic of the founding act, would shake the foundations of the society which it brings into existence.’ We charted throughout Levinas’ work the parody of messianism, and ultimately the trajectory of its disappearance. Is this gnomic final utterance, this ‘relaxation of essence’ to a second degree, perhaps what has become of this messianic horizon precisely in the

trajectory of its disappearance in Levinas' work? Would it be in following this 'relaxation of essence to a second degree' that the locus of messianism could be found? Would this messianic 'relaxation' not lead beyond the sanctification of the human in which *Otherwise than Being* is *wound up* and deeper precisely into the realm of the nonhuman? Yet as the articulation of this relaxation exceeds the boundaries of Levinas' work, so it exceeds our own.

### Conclusion

An understanding of what has most often been construed as messianism in *Otherwise than Being* requires an appreciation of its orientation towards the past and all that it entails. The 'immemorial past' which *Otherwise than Being* articulates via Husserl's *Phenomenology of Internal Time Consciousness* structures the paradigm of the 'suffering servant', ambiguous in itself, in a non-messianic direction. This is the culmination of the trajectory we have observed as determinative of the evolution of messianism in Levinas' work from the start. Messianism in Levinas is ordered according to the dynamic of the sanctification of the human, the articulation of the 'humanity of the human'. In *Otherwise than Being* this dynamic reaches an acute point insofar as the setting apart of the humanity *of* the human leads to the separation of this humanity *from* the human. We are faced with a humanism which overshoots the human towards the enigmatic collusion between nonhuman and transhuman forces which produce it. It is towards the end of rendering such a process of production, in which the human is a spectator of itself, nonetheless intelligible according to humanist schematics that the paradigm of the 'suffering servant' in Levinas comes into play. The 'suffering servant' becomes the human who in passivity *bears* the forces of 'humanity' – unveiled as the no man's land between nonhuman and transhuman – which structure it. This aspect determines the orientation of the paradigm of the suffering servant towards reminiscence rather than messianism: the degree of separation between the 'humanity of the human' and the human, in other words, has become too elevated to be articulated in terms of the messianism at work in *Totality and Infinity*: in terms, that is, of the *conversation* of the human and its displaced core articulated as the master-disciple relation. With this heightened degree of separation such a conversation is no longer possible. The communication of the human with its 'humanity' now takes place across the *reminiscence* of the 'humanity' (the non-human/trans-human) in the human: specifically it takes place across the reminiscence involved in the ritual re-enactment of the forces of production of the human in each subsequent social act. The displacement from messianism towards reminiscence is demonstrated in particular in the manner in which the

‘messianic task’ of the suffering servant orientated by the ‘infinite task’ towards moral perfection, as articulated by Cohen, serves in Levinas to articulate the transcendental reduction of politeness.

## CONCLUSION

Levinas' philosophy is not essentially messianic; alternatively, messianism in Levinas takes on an idiosyncratic character in function of certain exigencies determinative for his work. In following the line of this argument, we have touched on some major talking points in Levinas scholarship, as well as opened topics which we believe should be the subject of future debate. In what follows we shall outline the most significant of these.

In our exposition and interpretation of the messianism of both Rosenzweig and Levinas, we have held to the thesis of the 'parody' of messianism. In the proximity to Nietzsche which Rosenzweig's vision of Redemption exhibits, the appeal to messianism on behalf of the latter indeed leaves the question open as to whether it represents something of a consolidation rather than turn within the Nietzschean informed agenda of much postmodern discourse. We subsequently transferred this logic to the work of Levinas, seeing at work in the latter the same logic in which messianism takes on its function within a non-messianic economy. In addition, we argued decisively against any notion of messianism in Levinas as a 'turn' within postmodern; we indeed questioned the postmodern character of messianism in Levinas as such. Messianism in Levinas takes on its function at the point of transition between two notions of totality as the means of negotiating the transition towards the later postmodern notion. As such the understanding in postmodern terms of Levinas' messianism, in the terms that is, of an 'ethics of difference', constitutes something of a shackle or at least bridle to be loosened.

We have often referred to what we call the 'correlation' thesis considered to be at work in parallel fashion in Rosenzweig and Levinas. The notion of the 'parody' of messianism, although resonating somewhat controversially, is something of an extension of Newton's critique of the overly essentialised terms of the correlation thesis. Our contribution has been to apply this critique more specifically to the area of messianism in Levinas' thought, mapping Newton's thesis of the decidedly idiosyncratic character of Levinas' correlation, the correlation across the 'exaltation of the human', onto more general tendencies both in 'Judaism' and 'philosophy'. In effect the correlation, rather than a reorientation of 'philosophy' by 'Judaism', can be considered as a consolidation of a certain Nietzschean tendency in philosophy: we desecrated the implication of eschatology, the theory of the 'end days', in 'an eternal recurrence' or ritual cycle diversely articulated in all three thinkers. On the other hand, we noted, the integration of messianism into an eternal cycle of sanctification is also native to a certain 'Judaism'. Where does this leave us? With a series both of dualisms



and attempted rapprochements simultaneously rendered problematic. In effect we have a collapsed playing field. This is what the notion of parody serves to highlight: an inescapable proximity which remains no less uncomfortable for it. It could indeed be said that our thesis amounts to something of the parody, a distorted mirror image, of the correlation thesis.

Ultimately, however, this notion of parody serves to dim the light on the nodes of this correlation in order to focus attention on that across which and in function of which they are to be correlated: precisely this 'exaltation of the human' and all it implies. What is determinative in Levinas' notion of messianism, we have suggested, is not any dynamic or entelechy – subjective/interior or objective/historical - of salvation but precisely the cycle of the sanctification of the human. At the outset we posed the question of how to understand the notion of philosophical 'messianism'. We stated our ambition towards bringing this rather vague notion to some sort of clarity. This we have achieved, at least insofar as Levinas, is concerned, in defining messianism in Levinas quite idiosyncratically as the feedback mechanism or conversation which humanism has with its displaced core. Messianism in Levinas is the strategy, ultimately temporary, of coming to terms with the problems involved in, and indeed occasioning, the dynamic of the sanctification of the human. Parody signifies the fact that, across the evolution of Levinas' work, the discourse which at first presents itself as messianic gradually reveals its non-eschatological status.

Messianism in Levinas is not implicated first and foremost in the question of the relation between 'philosophy' and 'Judaism' but in the question of humanism: the question of its possibility or at least intelligibility. To what extent then does it provide then the point of orientation of a renewed vision of praxis? This is a question, we have suggested, which remains open in Levinas' work. Messianism in particular was shown to be fundamentally implicated in what is known as the passage from other to third. We have here attempted to make our own contribution to the controversy surrounding the status of this passage. The various considerations of Levinas on the question of humanism, or alternatively on the debate whether Levinas' work offers a renewed model of ethics or praxis for a 'post-Nietzschean' or 'post-Marxist' age, can be placed on a continuum: some are characterized by uncritical acceptance of Levinas; others, like Vanni or Wolff, by the attempt to critically reconstruct, to extract the potential from Levinas; others still, like Rose or Badiou by the blanket rejection of Levinas. We would prefer to embrace both extremes rather than opt for the middle ground. Levinas can be said to offer us a renewed praxis and humanistic vision only if we accept it on its own terms. The very dynamic of the sanctification of the human in Levinas for us constitutes *in itself* a form of praxis, a transformed vision of praxis: it constitutes namely a

transition from a vision of praxis as the realization of humanity against inhumanity to a vision of praxis as the setting apart of humanity from within inhumanity. What is suggested in notions such as messianism as ‘passive possibility’ and the culmination of Levinas’ ethics in the transcendental reduction of politeness is the ritual character of Levinas’ notion of praxis: the significance of Levinas’ praxis lies in its ritual efficacy, praxis as the *impulse* behind the turning of the cycle; and Levinas’ philosophy itself constitutes a form of ritual observance, the observance of society’s own ritual cycle motored by the dynamic of the setting apart of the human. Messianism in Levinas, as in Nietzsche and Rosenzweig, provides the momentum for this cycle, the energy behind this gesture of ritual observance. Of course according to the first model of praxis Levinas’ ethics remains entirely unacceptable. Levinas himself, we noted, betrays uneasiness in the conclusion to *Otherwise than Being*, uneasiness at a certain impasse reached or hiatus to be negotiated. We also noted that, in line with what we called the fetish character of the human in Levinas, at no stage in the work of the latter is the fundamental elusiveness of the specific intelligibility of the human overcome. It is this fact which necessitates a set of strategies of which messianism is an example.

We have unearthed a number of open questions in this study. Given limitations of space, our interpretation of Rosenzweig served more to throw up possibilities than to establish a definitive set of theses. The words ‘pantheism’, ‘vitalism’ and ‘theosophy’ resonated in our study of Rosenzweig as points worthy of further interrogation. We suggested that further study on Rosenzweig’s notion of daemonism was required, and all that such a theory implies in the relation between God, Man and World. This would occasion also greater study of the relation between Rosenzweig and Goethe. Such an inquiry would, we believe, lead to a more nuanced and hesitant vision of the correlation between Judaism and philosophy in his work. Another issue with which we could not engage here sufficiently is what we identified as the turn in Rosenzweig’s vision of Redemption from event to perspective –namely a certain theosophical perspective. For both Rosenzweig and Benjamin there is a question of history as the ‘piling up of wreckage’, essentially a response to the crisis of historicism. Comparison of their different ‘messianic’ strategies for coming to terms with this, in particular with regards to the implication of theosophy at least in Rosenzweig’s strategy, would be a worthwhile exercise. Insofar as Levinas is concerned, noticeable perhaps to the reader was our relative neglect of the messianism of his early work. On the one hand, this is due simply to the fact that, compared to *Totality and Infinity* and *Otherwise than Being*, *Time and the Other* and *Existence and Existents* constitute somewhat terse and incipient expressions of Levinas’ phenomenological vision. On the other hand, it is also due to the fact that we believe that

treatment of messianism in these texts requires a radically different approach. Messianism in these texts, we suggested, can be integrated into the metaphorical armoury arising from the modernist orientation of these early works. We had neither the space nor were sufficiently equipped to engage here with this aspect. It would require a greater sensitivity to the literary tropes and allusions and as such we believe that the question of modernism in Levinas is entirely worthy of a study in itself. Another question left open was the possibility of a certain rapprochement of Levinas and Durkheim, or of the potential of a reappraisal of Durkheim from the perspective of the phenomenology of religion. In this respect, Levinas' own suggestion that the work of Durkheim as an incipient theorist of different "levels of being", 'an idea which acquires its fullest meaning within the Husserlian and Heideggerian context', once this relation is qualified by a certain reversibility, appears eminently worthy of further consideration. (EI26)

We would like to close this study, however, by turning once more to the open question of humanism in Levinas' work, specifically with regards to what remains open in the question of messianism via association with the former question. We deferred any attempt at comparison of Levinas' messianism with that of the likes of Derrida for reasons given above. It is worth here outlining a possible approach to such a comparison, insofar as it follows from the impasse or hiatus emerging at the conclusion to *Otherwise than Being*. Through Levinas, we noted, Derrida glimpses the possibility of a messianism not tied to any particular positive tradition: a messianism 'before Sinai'. The 'before' to which Derrida refers here is rather 'a priori' of messianism, a messianism which determines the more specific appearance of messianism in all positive religions. The basis of this a priori messianicism is 'hospitality' or a 'fraternity' shown by the self to the other. This hospitality is messianic insofar as representing an anamnesis of an 'original peace' which serves as basis for envisaging a possible 'universal cosmopolitan peace'.<sup>423</sup> Running parallel to the formalizing of messianism into a pure 'a priori' stripped of all positive content, is a formalizing of Marxism likewise into pure formal 'promise' and 'imperative', ultimately to the point of conflation of the two horizons. Thrown into this admixture is in turn a certain self-understanding of deconstruction: 'that which is also irreducible to all deconstruction, that which remains non-deconstructible as the very possibility of deconstruction, is perhaps a certain experience of the emancipatory promise; it is indeed perhaps the formality of a structural messianism, a messianism without religion.'<sup>424</sup> The deconstruction of all determinate discursive practices recognizes its limits in

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<sup>423</sup> Derrida, *Spectres de Marx* p92

<sup>424</sup> *Ibid* p102

a purely indeterminate experience which both renders possible and demands deconstruction as the freeing of this experience from all constrictive textual conventions. Deconstruction is likewise undergirded by a certain indeterminate notion of 'justice' at a distance from all discursively fixed or institutionalized forms of justice. As Derrida outlines in more detail in his consideration of Benjamin's critique of violence, all determinate notions of justice, reactionary and revolutionary alike, must be deconstructed in view of the quasi-transcendental vision of justice with which the practice of deconstruction is infused.<sup>425</sup> Messianism, Marxism and deconstruction combine at the zero point of their respective horizons to form a single formalistic structure, one which can be glimpsed through and yet can never be fully decontaminated from the content of this triad.

As for Levinas so for Derrida is messianism inscribed within the horizon of the afterlife of humanism. Messianism in Derrida is symptomatic of something of a turn from the anti-humanism to which Derrida in his earlier career subscribed. Messianism becomes the 'hesitancy' before giving up entirely the notion of humanism despite the fact that it no longer has any determinable 'dogmatic' content. Messianism is tied to the phantom or 'revenant' of humanism, with arch-phantom 'Man', in which there is a relation of indecidability between the messianic and phantasmagorical horizon. Derrida, however, at the same time appears to envisage this revenant, or phantasmagorical *fetish*, as a bridge to be crossed over. Central for Derrida to the welcome of the other as stranger is the dimension of the 'uncanniness' (Unheimlichkeit) of the other who is welcomed. The other for Derrida is the 'stranger' whom we welcome and yet who has already crossed the threshold: 'domestic hospitality which welcomes the stranger, but a stranger who finds himself already inside (das Heimliche-Unheimliche).'<sup>426</sup> The other whom we welcome, and yet who has already entered, is in fact for Derrida one with the arch-phantom 'Man': the other who has already entered our foyer is essentially the human as such which we are; and yet this 'humanity' confronts us as something entirely strange and other to ourselves. The feeling of 'uncanniness' and anxiety before this phantom is the feeling of strangeness before that which is most intimate to us, and yet somehow strange to us: namely, the 'humanity' of the human.

As such, Derrida offers a formulation of the relation with the other at a slight remove from Levinas, a slight remove which makes, however, all the difference. The messianic horizon is inscribed: 'there where man arrives at his terminus (là où s'achève l'homme), a certain

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<sup>425</sup> Derrida, J 'Force of Law: the "Mystical Foundations of Authority"' in *Acts of Religion* (New York, Routledge, 2001) pp228-297

<sup>426</sup> Ibid p273

determinate concept of man, of the pure humanity of man, of the *other man* and of man *as other* begins or has at least the chance to announce itself – to promise itself. In an apparently inhuman or still ahuman way. (De façon apparemment inhumaine ou encore anhumaine.)<sup>427</sup> The ‘pure humanity of man’, an expression derived from Levinas, is placed into a zone of indecidability: is this ‘pure humanity of man’ the other as ‘man’ or, more enigmatically, man as ‘other’? This man ‘as other’ Derrida links to Kojève’s ‘post-historic Man’, a concept of humanity which would appear to us as ‘inhuman’ or ‘ahuman’ insofar as it would imply a hiatus between what we now understand as man and any future humanism. Yet Derrida’s formula perhaps allows a more radical interpretation. The identity of Man is such that his ‘humanity’ is most ‘intimate’ and yet most ‘strange’ to him. The *Unheimlichkeit* which characterizes man’s relation to whose own humanity is such, that is, that ‘man as other’ could equally signify the *other than man*. Beyond the sanctification of Man in the expression the ‘humanity of man’ which dominates Levinas’ ethics and leads it into its impasse, messianism would here be equivalent to a working *beyond* man, a working *beyond through* the phantom or fetish of man. The ‘inhumanity’ or ‘ahumanity’ of any future ‘humanity’ would perhaps not simply be a transitory appearance of this future humanity, how it appears relatively from our point of view, but the very *essence* of this future humanity.

Levinas’ work is characterized by the trajectory of the disappearance of messianism, in inverse proportion to the heightening of the dynamic of sanctification. The dynamic of the sanctification constitutes, we argued, the dynamic of the setting apart of the human from the inhuman, of the ‘creating a fence’ for the human. This culminates in the hiatus with which *Otherwise than Being* closes. Could the ‘relaxation of essence to a second degree’, therefore, precisely require a relaxation or crossing of the boundary which separates the human from inhuman? Does not the cycle of the sanctification of the human, in other words, close off by its very nature the possibility of messianism? Not explicitly ‘messianic’, yet nonetheless very much implicated in such a crossing, is the work of Deleuze and Guattari on ‘faciality’.<sup>428</sup> We wonder whether what Levinas calls the element of ‘pure expression’ in the face, precisely the dimension in which the messianic horizon is to open for Levinas, is not linked to what Deleuze and Guattari call the ‘overcoding’ of the face.<sup>429</sup> This overcoding is an expression of the ‘abstract’ and ‘inhuman’ machinery of the face, or of the process in which to be human is

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<sup>427</sup> Ibid p125

<sup>428</sup> Deleuze, G and Guattari, F ‘Year Zero Faciality’ in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Paris, Les Editions de Minuit, 1972) pp167-191

<sup>429</sup> Ibid p181

to be ‘pinned to the white wall and stuffed in the black hole’ of the face.’<sup>430</sup> To be ‘human’, in other words, signifies being ‘stuffed into’ an interiority which advertises itself across its physiognomic traits as a profaned secret, a profaned secret the entelechy towards which generates the magnetic field in which these physiognomic traits can gather into a signifying circuitry. More widely this process of ‘facialization’, this interplay between totalizing field of signifying and punctuation or zero point of subjectivity, is implicated in the process of the ‘despotic assemblage’: the ordering or delimiting of meaning creation into the exclusivist binary of linguistic code. On the one hand, the ‘overcoding’ of the face propped up as font and plenipotentiary of language goes hand in hand with the ‘decoding’ of the body. On the other hand, this draining of meaning in order to concentrate it and delimit its possibilities as possibilities of the ‘humanism’ of the face is symptomatic of a wider draining and concentration of meaning. The ‘black holes’ of the eyes represent the centre of gravity towards which all meaning is drawn in the process in which semiotic ‘polyvocality’, in being drawn towards this black hole, is transformed into the linguistic ‘univocality’ of language projected onto the delimited ‘white screen’ of the face - or of course of the page. Is not this overcoding of the face at the expense of the body one with what Levinas calls the ‘uprightness’ of the face which could as such be interpreted in quite literal terms?

The messianic horizon which accordingly suggests itself from the point of departure of the face for Deleuze and Guattari would be one with a process of ‘defacialization’: ‘yes, the face has a great future’, Deleuze and Guattari tell us, ‘but only if it is destroyed, dismantled’.<sup>431</sup> The face is not the end in itself but ‘a tool for which a new use must be invented.’ A new organization must be found: one which frees ‘faciality traits’ from their ineluctable trajectory towards subjectivity or the ‘black hole’ of interiority; one which allows these traits or semiotic growths to signify freely which is to say *non-subjectively*. The messianic here, one might say, is ‘on the road to the asignifying and asubjective’ in which the path *beyond* the face leads *through* the face. Envisaged is not any kind of regressive nostalgia but ‘quite spiritual and special becomings-animal’.<sup>432</sup> ‘Beyond the face’, we are told, ‘lies an altogether different inhumanity’.<sup>433</sup>

Adorno, on the other hand, does not speak of a beyond the face but a messianism of the reverse or of the *reversibility* of the face. To a thinker for whom the question of *society* is a *theological* question insofar as it is concerned immanently with the question of *nature*, for

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<sup>430</sup> Ibid

<sup>431</sup> Ibid p171

<sup>432</sup> Ibid

<sup>433</sup> Ibid p190

whom social transformations require natural transformations carried out socially on or by society's natural phenomena, and for whom society's most natural phenomenon is not 'nature' but individuality or interiority, it is in the confrontation of this interiority with the world of things to which it belongs that the messianic horizon takes on significance. We wish namely to highlight the importance in Adorno's corpus of the Adorno-Benjamin correspondence on the topic of Kafka and in particular with regards to the figure of Odradek in Kafka's parable a 'Householder's Concern'.<sup>434</sup> Odradek is the mythical partially animate, partially inanimate creature composed of pieces of household detritus who sporadically appears to the father of a house inspiring anxiety in the latter, and of whom Kafka gives the following description: 'one is tempted to believe that the creature once had some sort of intelligible shape and is now only a broken-down remnant. Yet this does not seem to be the case; at least there is no sign of it; nowhere is there an unfinished or unbroken surface to suggest anything of the kind; the whole thing looks senseless enough, but in its own way perfectly finished.' That this 'broken down remnant' might signify the Deleuze and Guattari's 'dismantled' face we leave open as a live possibility. For Adorno in any case the 'face' of Odradek constitutes a 'prolegomenon to Scripture'. Odradek is the 'face of the other side of things', the 'face' of a suppressed nature, and as such constitutes the promise of Redemption in the 'reconciliation of the organic and inorganic.' Of course, Odradek is to a large extent simply the mirror image of the father to whom it appears: a return of the repressed, a reminder of what the father really is. Interiority sees down its own process of interiorization, recognizing it as a natural process: a draining of meaning from nature and concentration in interiority precisely in the sense of Deleuze and Guattari. Odradek as the defacialization of humanity into nature becomes utopian/messianic insofar as in the reversibility of this process it is also the facialization of nature. The discussion of Odradek takes its place as a utopian figure among others in the Benjamin/Adorno partnership, notably that of the collector of the 'physiognomist of the world of things.'<sup>435</sup>

To what extent is the 'relaxation of essence to the second degree' or the possibility of messianism in Levinas bound up with the process of defacialization or in the orientation towards the reverse image of the face which Odradek constitutes as the 'face' of 'the world of things'? To what extent is the possibility of messianism in Levinas bound, beyond the dynamic of the setting apart of the human, to a recognition of the intelligibility of the non-

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<sup>434</sup> Wiesengrund-Adorno to Benjamin, Berlin 16.12.34 *The complete correspondence, 1928-1940 / Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge; Polity Press, 2003) pp65-72

<sup>435</sup> *Charles Baudelaire: a Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism* (London, NLB, 1973) p169

human? In this respect, does not the marginalized messianism of the 'feminine' in Levinas represent the expression par excellence of messianism? <sup>436</sup> Should we not understand the 'Beyond the Face' by which Levinas' opens his consideration of the feminine in *Totality and Infinity* precisely as a *messianic* 'beyond'? Levinas characterizes this 'beyond' as follows: 'love also goes beyond the beloved. This is why through the face filters the obscure light coming from beyond the face, from what is not yet, from a future never future enough, more remote than the possible.' (TI254) In going 'beyond the face' the relation with the feminine other, or the radical future which this relation embodies, goes 'beyond' the feminine other herself. In other words, it goes 'beyond' the 'personal' character, the 'personality' or one might say the 'humanity', of the other. The movement of the withdrawing of the feminine is equivalent to 'dis-individualising and relieving itself of its own weight of being'. (TI256) The relation with the 'feminine' other is not, that is, a different manner of relating to the same other, to the same alterity. It is a different form of alterity, a 'dis-individualised' or ahuman form of alterity. Levinas makes this clear: 'the caress aims at neither a person nor a thing', writes Levinas, 'it loses itself in a being that dissipates as though into an impersonal dream . . . an already animal or infantile anonymity.' (TI259) Alternatively, 'an amorphous non-I sweeps away the I into an absolute future where it escapes itself and loses its position as subject.' (TI259) Here we have a messianism of the 'animal', the 'amorphous', the 'anonymous', the 'non-I'. The relation with the 'feminine' within the horizon of 'Eros' is a 'disfigurement' of the face. (TI262) Yet it is in this 'disfigurement' that the messianic horizon most fully opens in *Totality and Infinity*, beyond the mere deferral of the present of historical time in the relation with the other as master and in the fecundity and paternity which is made by Levinas to follow the phenomenology of Eros. The 'beyond' of the 'beyond the face' is a messianic beyond: it is precisely through the 'disfigurement' of the face, the face on the sanctification of which Levinas' work is centred, that the messianic dimension in Levinas achieves its fullest expression. This messianism, in the process of its marginalization in

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<sup>436</sup> Interesting in this context is the Talmudic Commentary 'Beyond Memory' in which Levinas considers the dimension of the *radical future*. The context here is a discussion of the question whether there will one day come when the recalling of the Exodus from Egypt will no longer be required as the defining moment of Judaism. One archetype, however, has a privileged relation with this radical future: the feminine that in a 'masculine world', de jure and de facto for Levinas as we have just seen, nonetheless 'constitutes 'an essential problem for "a time that overflows memories"'. (HN86) The privileged figure of this aspect of the ambiguity of the feminine is that of Sarah: 'Abraham will soon hear (Genesis 27:12): "and in all that Sarah says to you, obey her voice." In prophecy itself, a possible subordination of the male inspiration to the female.' (HN86) Next to and in contradiction with the subordination of the female inspiration to the male in the dynamic of sanctification, is the 'possible' subordination of the masculine to the feminine with regards to the eschatological dimension.



Levinas' work, exceeds the dynamics of sanctification, the raising and separating out of the 'holiness' of the human.

Do we not see indicated here a messianism of the 'dismantling' of the face, a spiritual 'becoming-animal', 'beyond' the sanctification of the human a messianism of an 'altogether different inhumanity'? The relation with the feminine is different from the relation with the elemental insofar as it presupposes the relation with the face, with the other via language. As such does not then the relation with the feminine represent a return to the elemental, a return spiritualized via the dimension of language and the relation with the other: a 'messianic' return? Is the possibility of messianism in Levinas not indicated by this return to the elemental from and via the face, a return to the 'sacred' from and via the 'holy'? Alternatively, does not the trajectory of the 'lived time' of interiority from 'fecundity' to 'ageing' in Levinas betray to us that 'our private vision is death and the seers are yellow'?

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